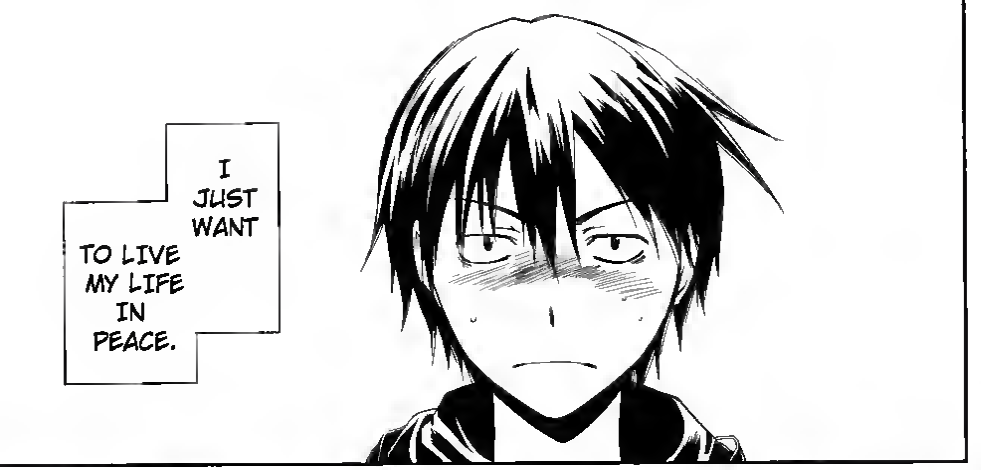
ASAHI COMICS ファンタジー

ノキ

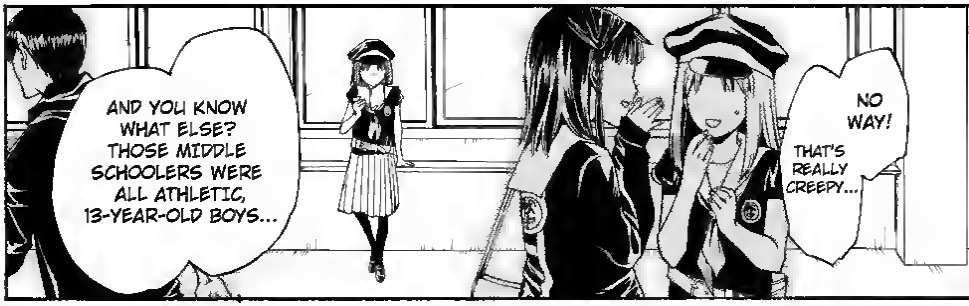
原案・脚本・監修
井龍一


I JUST WANT TO LIVE MY LIFE IN PEACE.

I JUST WANT TO FEND OFF, DODGE, AND RUN AWAY FROM EVERYTHING.
YEAH!
YOU GOT A PROBLEM OR SOMETHIN'?
WHAT'RE YOU LOOKIN' AT, SHRIMP?
WITHOUT TROUBLE,
WITHOUT DISCORD...

YEP...
THAT'S THE LIFE I WISH I HAD...
HEY, SHRIMP
WANNA DIE?

THERE HAVE BEEN A LOT OF WEIRD INCIDENTS INVOLVING MIDDLE SCHOOLERS LATELY..
キリーン
RING
I'VE HEARD STORIES ABOUT SOME GETTING ATTACKED BY WEIRD THINGS, OR HAVING THE SAME DELUSION,
コロ
DON
YEAH, I KNOW!
THERE'S EVEN BEEN TALK OF PEOPLE WHO'VE DISAPPEARED ALTOGETHER!
カラーン
RING


AND YOU KNOW WHAT ELSE? THOSE MIDDLE SCHOOLERS WERE ALL ATHLETIC, 13-YEAR-OLD BOYS...
NO WAY!
THAT'S REALLY CREEPY...

ROOK: "WHAT MAKES A MAN"
STOMP STOMP STOMP
SOMEONE SAID THAT IF ADOLESCENT BOYS EXERCISE TOO MUCH, IT CAN LEAD TO AN OVERSECRETION OF BRAIN CHEMICALS...

WHOOSH
WHOOSH
WAIT UP, SHRIMP!
IT'S TIME TO DIE!!
GRIP
THINK YOU'RE FAST, HU...
BATTLE
BATTLE
GET BACK HERE!
WOAHHHH
FWOOM

SLIDE
WAH!
SLIP
!?
C'MERE...
HOP
HUH-

LEAP

!
YOU'RE GONNA PAY FOR THAT!!
DASH
YOU CAN RUN AND HIDE ALL YOU WANT, BUT...
BLECH!
PFFT!
PFFT!
WHAT THE?!
DASH
COUGH
BAM
I HAVE CRAM SCHOOL TODAY, SO WE GOTTA KILL HIM BEFORE SIX!
...HE'S DEAD! HE'S SUPER DEAD!!
I'M NOT GOIN' HOME UNTIL I KILL HIM!!

TAP TAP
...
DASH
YOU GO UPSTAIRS,
AND WE'LL GO DOWN!
WHICH WAY DID HE GO?
DASH
DASH
PHEW...
SIGH
LOOKS LIKE I MANAGED TO GET AWAY.
KA...
KAZU!?
WOO OOO OW!
LOOK AT THAT BIG LOCUST UP THERE!
WHA...
HUH?!
THWACK
THWACK

DROP
STEP UP THERE AND FACE THEM LIKE A MAN!
WHY ARE YOU RUNNING AWAY, KEN?
YOU KNOW, I HAVE CONFIDENCE IN MY ESCAPING AND HIDING ABILITIES,
BUT FOR SOME REASON, YOU'RE ALWAYS ABLE TO FIND ME, KAZU.
TCHI
STOMP
I'VE KNOWN YOU SINCE YOU WERE A LITTLE KID IT'S INTUITION
THOSE THUGS THAT WERE CHASING YOU
THEY'RE THE ONES WHO STARTED THIS, RIGHT?
...
YOU AREN'T WEAK.
...YOU EVEN USED TO BE COOL.
JUSTICE IS ON YOUR SIDE! WHY DON'T YOU FIGHT BACK?
WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU ARE, A BOXING COACH?
I'M WEAK! AND BESIDES, IF I FOUGHT, I'M CONFIDENT THAT I'D DIE WITHIN THE FIRST 30 SECONDS
PAT PAT
PEOPLE SEEM TO LIKE TO PICK ON YOU, SO YOU SHOULD USE THIS AS A CHANCE TO FIGHT BACK AND GET STRONGER!

PLUS... YOU KNOW WHO YOUR FATHER IS.
THERE'S NO WAY YOU COULD BE WEAK, KEN.

WHAT DOES BEING "COOL" MATTER?
IF RUNNING AND HIDING CAN KEEP ME OUT OF TROUBLE, THEN ISN'T THAT THE SMARTER CHOICE?
THAT IS NO WAY TO LIVE!!

...!
KEN...
I FOUND HIM!
WELL...
NO. THAT'S WHY I RUN.
KEN...
YOU DON'T WANT TO GET HURT, DO YOU?
...
...
SO PATHETIC...
SLIP
PFFT
PSSH

STARE YOUR ENEMY IN THE EYES, BEAR YOUR FANGS,
IF YOU DON'T WANT TO GET HURT,
THEN FIGHT BACK!
...
HMPH ...
!!!
A MOSQUITO...!?
...?
?

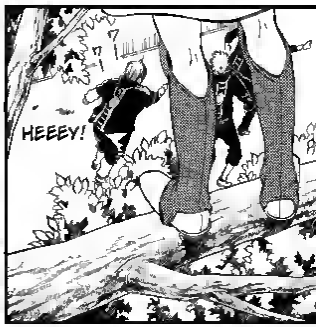
...ENOUGH ALREADY.
AND FIGHT!!
KEN!!

THIS HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH YOU!!

I'LL JUST HAVE TO MAKE YOU WANT TO FIGHT.
USING FORCE.
ALRIGHT
I UNDERSTAND HOW YOU FEEL NOW
WHOOSH
SIGH
TA-DA!!
KEN ISHII'S RIGHT OVER HERE!!
HEY, THUGS!
JERK
WHAT?!

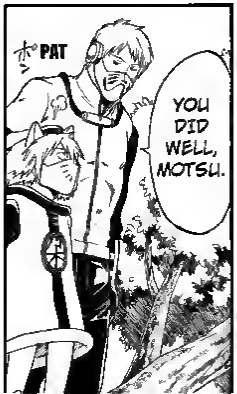
THANKS, RANDOM GIRL!
HE'S OVER THERE!!
PLEASE BEAT THE LIVING CRAP OUT OF HIM, GENTLEMEN!
DASH
KAZU, YOU IDIOT!

MOTCHIKO
I FOUND KEN ISHII
FSSH
MOTSU!
SINCE WHEN HAVE YOU BEEN HERE?


HEEEY!

...

HMMM.
BUT I'M CURIOUS ABOUT HIS CIRCUM-STANCES LET'S WATCH HIM FOR A BIT

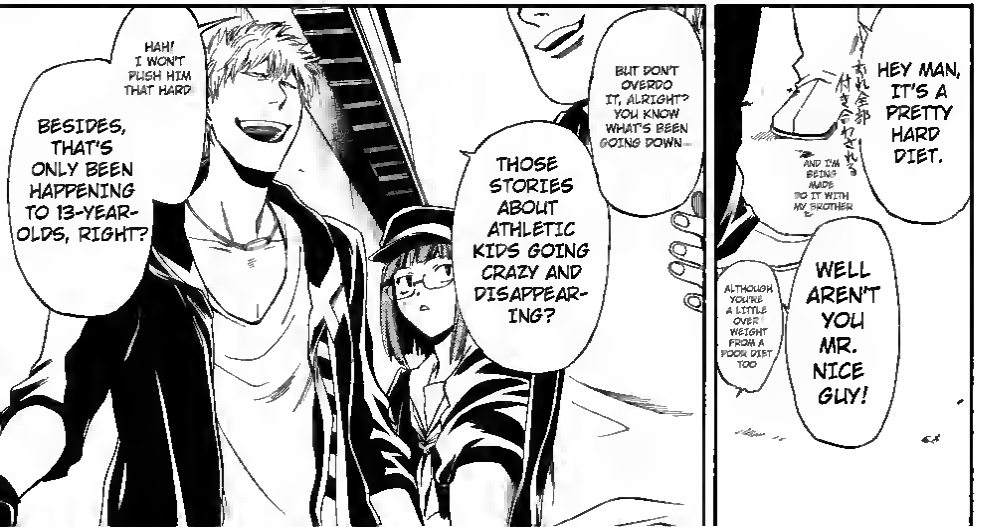

PAT
YOU DID WELL, MOTSU.

THE SUCCESS-OR?!
HE'S RIGHT OVER THERE
WOAAHH!
DASH

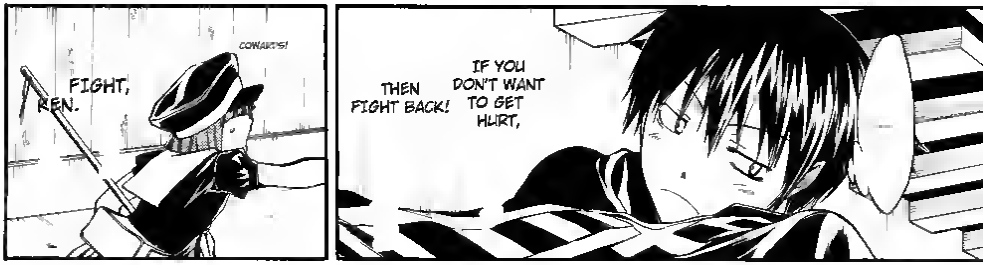
FOR-WARD MAAAA AARCH!
STOMP
STOMP
WOMEN'S AND CHILDHOOD FRIENDS' INTUITIONS CAN SOMETIMES FELL ENTIRE ARMIES, MAJOR THUG!
IN-TU-IT-ION!
HEY, ARE YOU SURE HE REALLY WENT THIS WAY?!

SIGN BAR

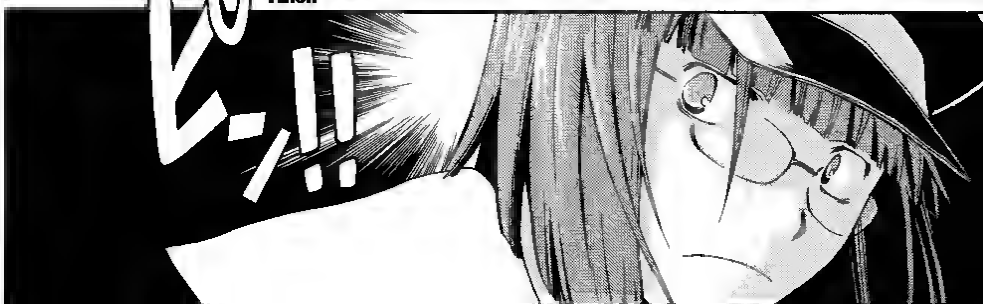
AND WHERE THE HELL DID YOU GET THAT EXCUSE?!
I HAVE CRAM SCHOOL, TOO
WHAT?! COULD YOU BE MORE ABRUPT?!
HEY, WAIT! IT'S TIME FOR ME TO GO HELP MY BRO LOSE WEIGHT AT THE GYM
LATERS.


HAH! I WON'T PUSH HIM THAT HARD
BESIDES, THAT'S ONLY BEEN HAPPENING TO 13-YEAR-OLDS, RIGHT?
THOSE STORIES ABOUT ATHLETIC KIDS GOING CRAZY AND DISAPPEAR-ING?
BUT DON'T OVERDO IT, ALRIGHT? YOU KNOW WHAT'S BEEN GOING DOWN...
HEY MAN, IT'S A PRETTY HARD DIET.
AND I'M BEING MADE TO DO IT WITH MY BROTHER
WELL AREN'T YOU MR. NICE GUY!
ALTHOUGH YOU'RE A LITTLE OVERWEIGHT FROM A POOR DIET TOO

YOU THINK I'M GONNA LET YOU IDIOTS CATCH ME?
I WANNA GRAB A SNACK AND TAKE A NAP
MEH WE'LL DO IT SOME OTHER TIME
HEY... WHAT ABOUT KEN?!
AREN'T YOU GUYS GONNA BEAT HIM TO A PULP?!
HEY!
ANY-WAY... SEE YA!


COWARDS!
FIGHT, KEN.
THEN FIGHT BACK!
IF YOU DON'T WANT TO GET HURT,

ALL I NEED TO DO IS RUN, HOLD MY BREATH, AND THEN WAIT FOR THE TROUBLE TO PASS...
I'M HAPPY WITH HOW I AM.

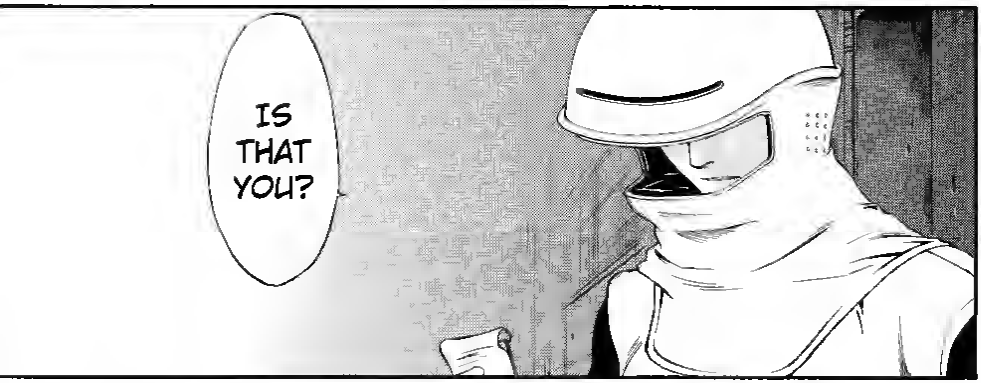

FLASH

H... HOW DID YOU FIND ME?
INTUITION, I SUPPOSE!
SLATTER
AAAAAGH
HE'S UP THERE!
SMACK
IF THE THUGS ARE GONE, THEN I'LL JUST HAVE TO DO THIS MYSELF!
RRIP
PREPARE YOURSELF...
IT'S PAIN TIME!
ARE YOU SURE YOU'RE REALLY A GIRL?!
PAIN TIME? WHAT ARE YOU, A SADIST?
SILENCE! THERE IS NO ESCAPE!!
WHERE DID YOU GO?
KEEEEN!
...WELL,
AT LEAST EVEN IF SHE'S CHASING ME I'D BE ABLE TO GET AWAY.
TAP TAP
GROWL

HMM... FOR AN UNDEVELOPED ONE HIS MOVEMENT AND CONCEALMENT ABILITIES ARE TRULY SOMETHING
IT'S ALL IN HIS BLOOD...
...ISN'T IT?
MAN, I'M HUNGRY... I WONDER IF GRANDMA'S HOME YET.
STUPID ME...
I WISH I COULD JUST WALK HOME, BUT I LEFT MY BAG AT SCHOOL...

?
WHAT'S WRONG...
WHAT'S THIS WEIRD FEELING ALL OF A SUDDEN...?
MY HEART... ...HURTS...
WHAT... ...THE?

SIGH...
13 YEARS OLD.
KEN ISHII
NOTED TO HAVE EXCEPTIONAL SPEED AND CONCEALMENT ABILITIES.


IS THAT YOU?

GEEZ...
AREN'T YOU SUPPOSED TO INTRODUCE YOURSELF FIRST BEFORE YOU ASK FOR SOMEONE ELSE'S NAME?
THAT IS ME, THOUGH...
THAT GUY ...
MUST BE SOME KIND OF CLEANER.
WHAT A WEIRD OUTFIT ...
WHO IS THIS GUY?
UMM. EXCUSE ME, BUT WHO ARE YOU?
IS THAT YOU?

LUNCH
UH...
SKNTCH...
WAAAAAAHHH!!
わぁあ!!
LEAP
GGH!
WHAM
HRM

WHAM
HEY.. WHAT IS THIS..
WHY ME?! WHAT ARE THESE THINGS?!
GSH
GSH
WHOOSH

GSH
L...
LET ME GO.
HIS AGE AND HIS EXCELLENT PHYSICAL ABILITIES ARE THE ONLY INFORMATION THAT I HAVE
HE'S THE ELDEST SON OF A CERTAIN MAN.
I'M LOOKING FOR A BOY.
THUD
KNOW HIM?

DO YOU KNOW OF A MAN NAMED ZUIEKI NOGI?
!?
...NO.

I'M NOT LYING... I HAVE NO REASON TO.
I'VE... NEVER HEARD OF ANYONE LIKE THAT...
AND IT'S DEFI-NITELY NOT MY NAME...

THAT MAN'S FROM THE ANTI-NOGI INSPECTION SQUAD...
HE MUST BE AFTER THE SAME THING WE ARE.

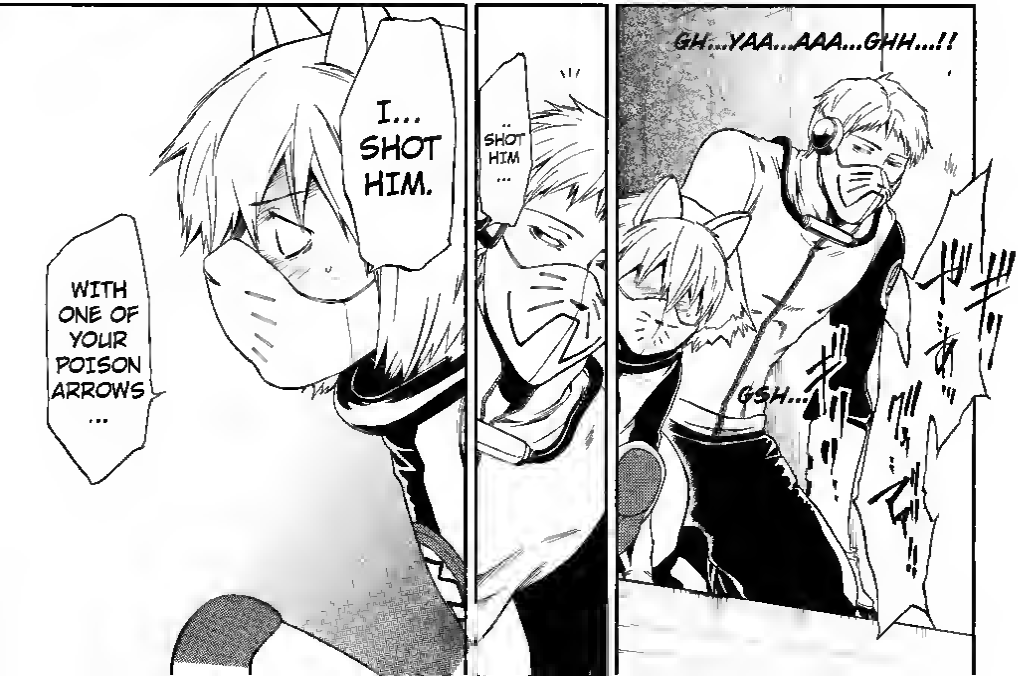
... AREN'T YOU GOING TO GO DOWN THERE?
IT SEEMS LIKE THEY HAVE LITTLE TO NO CLUES ABOUT THE BOY THEY'RE LOOKING FOR.
SO THEY'RE JUST ATTACKING ANY AND EVERY BOY THAT MIGHT FIT THE BILL.

WHAT... IS THIS...
THROB
THIS FEELING ISN'T COMING FROM THIS GUY...
IT'S LIKE... ALL MY BLOOD'S BEEN TURNED INTO POISON...
THROB...

UGGGH!
THROB

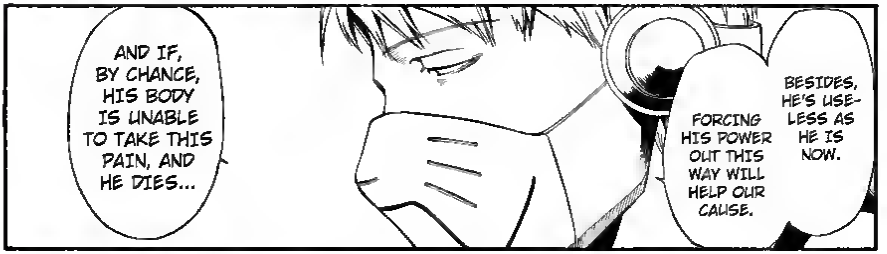
IF I GO DOWN THERE, THEY'LL LEARN THAT HE'S THE ONE.
WE HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO STAND BY AND WATCH
BESIDES, I DOUBT THEY'D GO AS FAR AS KILLING AN INNOCENT BOY.
...AT LEAST, I HOPE NOT.
FLEX
AGH
OH, PLEASE.
I HAVEN'T EVEN ORDERED HIM TO ATTACK YET.
CAN'T YOU TAKE A LITTLE PAIN?
SQUEEZE
UHGH
AHH
NO MATTER
I DIDN'T EXPECT YOU TO FESS UP FROM THE BEGINNING, ANYWAY.
WAVE
AUGH...
GUH..
UGH..

GWAH..
IF YOU'D BE HONEST AND TELL ME ALL ABOUT ZUIEKI, IT'LL ALL BE OVER SOON.
NOW ANSWER
DO YOU KNOW ZUIEKI NOGI?
AGH..
AHH
AAAGH!!!
GSH
GSH
NO...!
N...
GUH!


I... SHOT HIM.
WITH ONE OF YOUR POISON ARROWS ...
.. SHOT HIM ...
GH...YAA...AAA...GHH...!!
GSH...

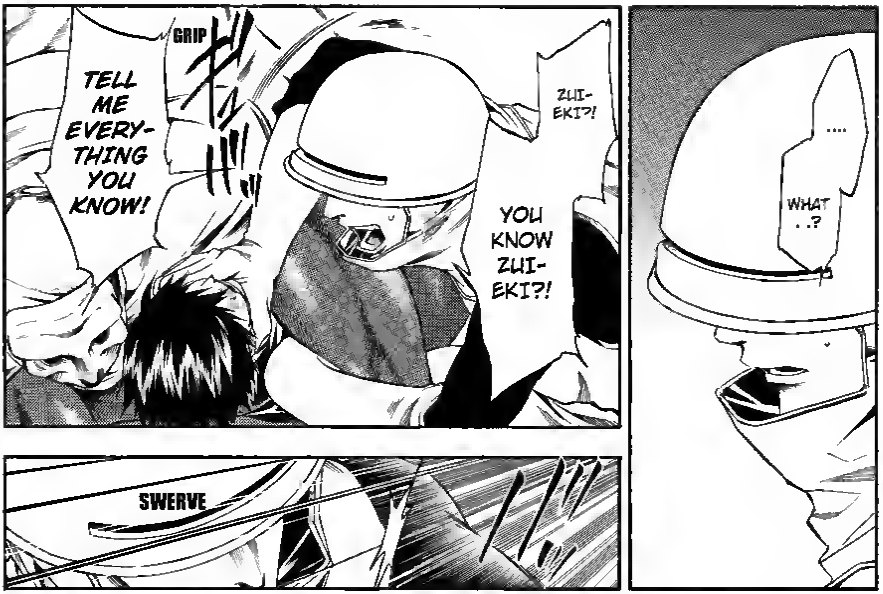
YOU'RE KIDDING ...!
YOU SHOT HIM WITH LETHAL POISON?!
YOU HAVE THE ANTI-DOTE, SO I THOUGHT WE COULD JUST HEAL HIM WHEN-EVER WE WANTED.
I JUST THOUGHT IT'D BE GOOD FOR HIM TO SUFFER A LITTLE ...!
SQUEEZE
HE LOOKED SO PA-THETIC...
I MEAN ....
I...
I JUST
WHAT WERE YOU THIN-KING, MOTSU?
... NOT YET.
WHA ...
GYAAGGGH
I...IF WE DON'T GET DOWN THERE QUICK,
HE'LL DIE ...

LETTING THEM FIND OUT ABOUT US AND THE BOY IS FAR TOO RISKY.
WE MUST WAIT UNTIL THEY LEAVE...
ALSO-
SHAKE
AAGGHH
HIS UN-DEVELOPED ABILITIES ARE TIED TO HIS SURVIVAL INSTINCT.
THE MORE DANGER HE'S PUT IN, THE EASIER IT WILL BE FOR THEM TO AWAKEN.
GYAAAHH
AAAGH


BESIDES, HE'S USE-LESS AS HE IS NOW.
FORCING HIS POWER OUT THIS WAY WILL HELP OUR CAUSE.
AND IF, BY CHANCE, HIS BODY IS UNABLE TO TAKE THIS PAIN, AND HE DIES...

IT'LL SIMPLY MEAN THAT
HE DOESN'T HAVE WHAT IT TAKES TO BE OUR LEADER.

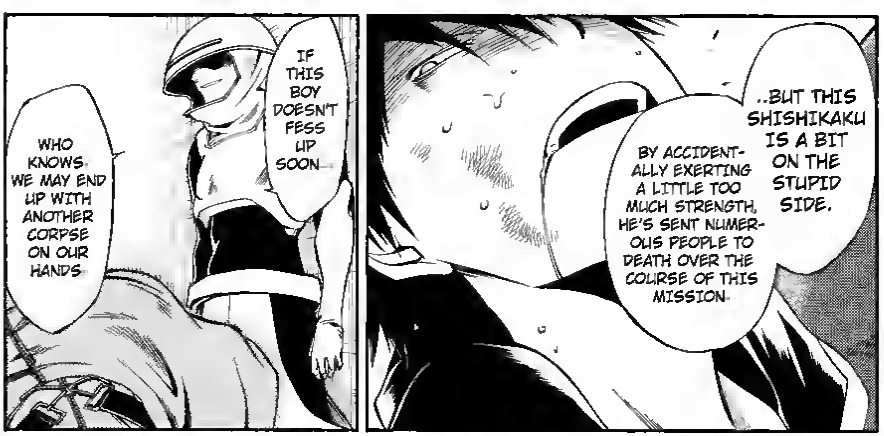
SNAP
GSH
TWIST
GA...AHHH
ALL YOU NEED TO DO IS ANSWER ME, AND ALL THIS COULD BE OVER
WELL, KID?
GSSSH
HEY!
LIGHTEN UP A LITTLE, SHISHIKAKU!
...TCH.
THIS THING NEEDS A BETTER BRAIN.
IT'S ALREADY KILLED NUMEROUS INNOCENTS BY ACCIDENT
I SHOULD HAVE BROUGHT ANOTHER ONE
GSSH
GSSH
I DON'T WANT TO GET HURT
BE-CAUSE
GSH
I DON'T ... KNOW ... HIM ...
GSH
I DON'T WANT TO END UP ...
LIKE ZUIEKI ...


GRIP
TELL ME EVERY-THING YOU KNOW!
ZUI-EKI?!
YOU KNOW ZUI-EKI?!
....
WHAT ..?
SWERVE

GSK
KAZU
K
!
TEKAKU!!
THIS ALLEY IS OFF LIMITS AT THE MOMENT. GO AROUND!
TCH!
A PEDE-STRIAN
SKRITCH...
GRR
AHHH..
ZAHHH
!
WHAM

NOW THIS IS SOMETHING.
YOU SAW SOMEONE YOU KNOW IN A SITUATION LIKE THIS, AND DIDN'T RUN.
YOU TWO MUST BE REALLY CLOSE.
GSH

MY JOB IS TO GET THE NECESSARY INFORMATION FROM THE NECESSARY PEOPLE,
SO YOU'VE JUST MADE MY JOB A WHOLE LOT EASIER.
SCRITCH SCRITCH
AGH
RELAX. KILLING ISN'T PART OF MY JOB DESCRIPTION.


..BUT THIS SHISHIKAKU IS A BIT ON THE STUPID SIDE.
BY ACCIDENTALLY EXERTING A LITTLE TOO MUCH STRENGTH, HE'S SENT NUMEROUS PEOPLE TO DEATH OVER THE COURSE OF THIS MISSION.
IF THIS BOY DOESN'T FESS UP SOON...
WHO KNOWS. WE MAY END UP WITH ANOTHER CORPSE ON OUR HANDS.

FLICK
ALL BECAUSE OF YOU.
POOR THING.
GWAA AAAA AAAA AAHH
AGH
GREE
GSH GSH GSH
NOW ANSWER.
IS ZUIEKI NOGI YOUR FATHER?

DAD ...
DAD, WHERE ARE YOU GOING?
KEN. GO BACK INSIDE, YOU HEAR ME?
AND NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS ... DON'T FOLLOW ME.
SLASH!!

HIDE, MOTSU!
WH...
WHO ARE YOU PEOPLE?!
HOP
MAYBE...
I REALLY AM GONNA DIE...
...OH. LET ME GUESS, THEY'RE MORE ENEMIES ...
...WHO ARE THOSE PEOPLE? WHY DID THEY JUMP OUT FROM THERE?
...AND WHAT ARE THOSE WEIRD MASKS ON THEIR FACES?

BOOM!!
TOSS
!
SWERVE
CHK
CHK
CHK
?!
KHH!
GRIP
NOGI SCUM !!
OH, I SEE ...
YOU'RE ...
WHAM

THE ANTIDOTE MOTOHIKO JUST TRIED TO ADMINISTER TO HIM...
I DO HAVE A LOT OF THINGS I WANT TO ASK HIM.
RELAX
I WON'T KILL YOU OR THE BOY JUST YET.
IT'S RIGHT OVER THERE ...
CLENCH
...!
WHICH MEANS
THIS REALLY IS NOGI'S SON!
IT'S FUTILE.
SHISHI-KAKU MAY LACK STRATEGY AND POWER,
BUT THEIR HOLDS ARE UNBREAK-ABLE
...
BUT IT'S HIS FAULT FOR BEING SO WEAK ...
SO WHAT IF HE DIES ...
WHAT DIFFERENCE WOULD IT MAKE?!

ZU...
ZZUUU...
HH
I FEEL SOME-THING IN THE AIR...
...
HUH?
CRACK

... WH
CLATTER
SNAP
WHAT THE HELL ...
ZUUU...
ARE YOU ...?!

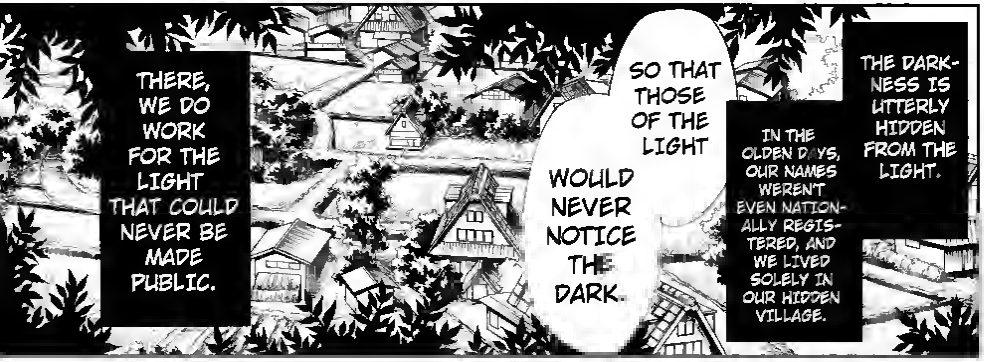
IT...
ZUAAGYAHH
CRACKLE
IT CAN'T BE ...
NOGI ...

BLINK
SLIDE
WHAT THE
THAT DREAM FELT SO REAL.
HURRY, OR ELSE YOU'LL BE LATE TO SCHOOL!
OKAY
AND FOR SOME REASON I STILL FEEL REALLY TIRED
CHIRP CHIRP
GRAND MA
?
YOU FINALLY WOKE UP! GOOD MORNING, KEN!
HUH... WAIT
HURRY DOWNSTAIRS, NOW
BREAKFAST'S WAITING FOR YOU
MUNCH MUNCH
MOR-NIN'.
SORRY, BUT WE DIDN'T WAIT FOR YOU.

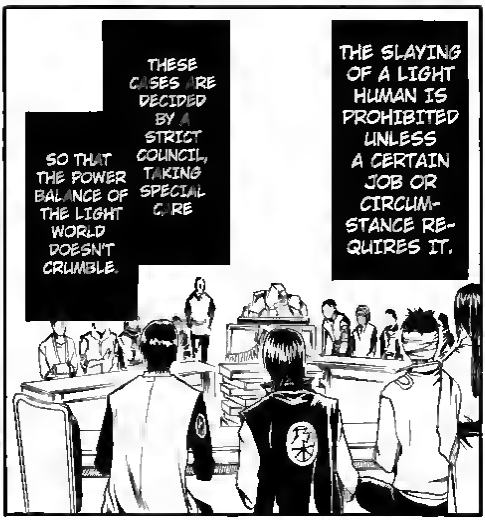
TA-DAH!
...AAAHHH!!
GRR
YOU AREN'T MUCH DIFF-ERENT.
WELL THAT'S A MEAN WAY TO PUT IT
YANK
E...
ENEMIES...!
WHAM!!
...
HUH ...
I FEEL LIKE I'VE SEEN THIS ONE SOMEWHERE BEFORE...
NOW THAT I LOOK CLOSELY...
MUNCH
BUT WHO ...
WHAT AM I, RECYCLABLE TRASH?!
AFTER WE TOOK ALL THAT TROUBLE TO RETURN YOU TO YOUR PROPER PLACE WHEN YOU WERE DISCARD-ED ON THE ROAD...

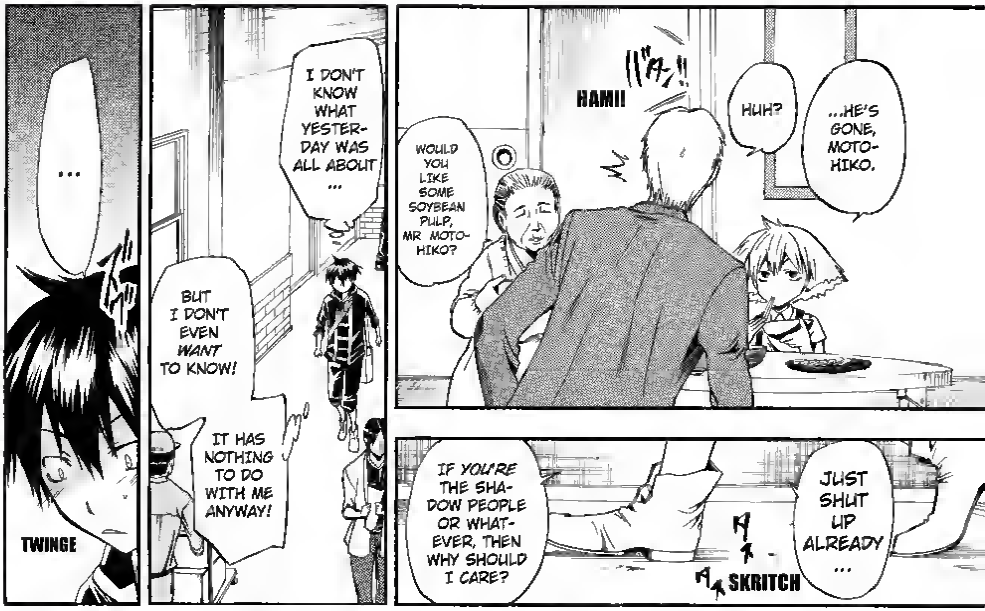
I'M GOING TO LIVE A PEACEFUL LIFE...!
DON'T GET INVOLVED IN ANYTHING DANGEROUS..
I DON'T KNOW WHAT WENT ON BACK THERE,
BUT I DON'T WANT ANY PART IN IT!
RATTLE
IS THE FOOD ALRIGHT, MR MOTO-HIKO?
GRANDMA, WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE?!
CRUNCH
IT'S DELICIOUS
WELL, YOU DID FAINT EARLY ON, SO
IF YOU WANT TO KNOW WHAT HAPPENED AFTER-WARDS
D...
DON'T TELL ME!
I DON'T CARE!
GWAH
GNUNGLE
WHEN YOU TRY TOO HARD TO BE FUNNY, IT ONLY GETS EMBARR-ASSING YOU KNOW
THE MAN WHO ATTACKED YOU IS
AAAH HHHH HHHH HHHH HHHH
I CAN'T HEAR YOU! I CAN'T HEAR YOUUU!!
ALLOW ME TO START
FROM THE BEGIN-NING.

THERE ARE SOME WHO HAVE JOBS AND FAMILIES IN THE LIGHT, BUT THEY HIDE THE FACT THAT THEY ARE FROM THE DARKNESS.
WHILE WE LIVE IN THE DARKNESS, SEPARATED,
OUR CLAN CALLS SOCIETY THE 'LIGHT.'

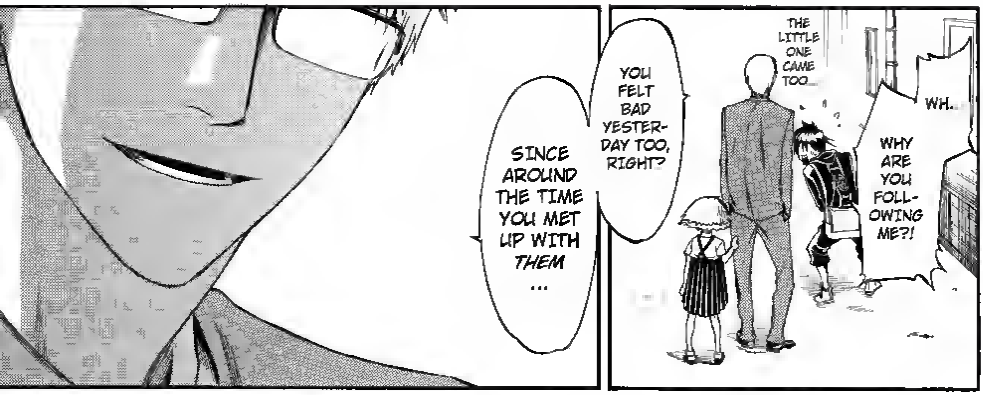

THERE, WE DO WORK FOR THE LIGHT THAT COULD NEVER BE MADE PUBLIC.
SO THAT THOSE OF THE LIGHT WOULD NEVER NOTICE THE DARK.
IN THE OLDEN DAYS, OUR NAMES WEREN'T EVEN NATIONALLY REGISTERED, AND WE LIVED SOLELY IN OUR HIDDEN VILLAGE.
THE DARKNESS IS UTTERLY HIDDEN FROM THE LIGHT.

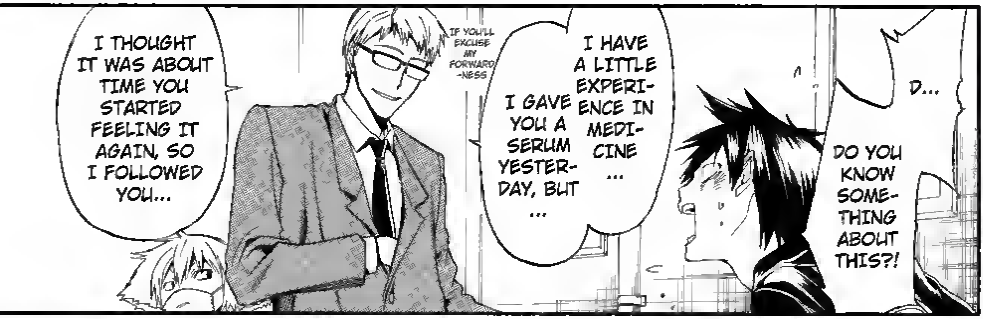
IT IS BY THAT BASIC PRINCIPLE THAT WE LIVE OUR LIVES.
"BE OF THE SHADOWS."


SO THAT THE POWER BALANCE OF THE LIGHT WORLD DOESN'T CRUMBLE.
THESE CASES ARE DECIDED BY A STRICT COUNCIL, TAKING SPECIAL CARE
THE SLAYING OF A LIGHT HUMAN IS PROHIBITED UNLESS A CERTAIN JOB OR CIRCUMSTANCE REQUIRES IT.

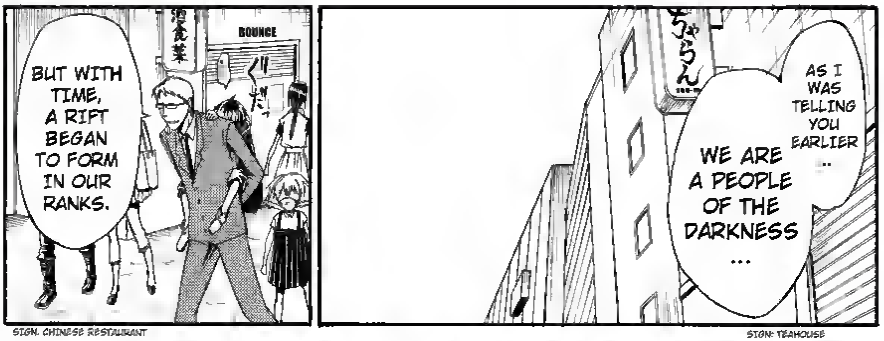

...
TWINGE
I DON'T KNOW WHAT YESTER-DAY WAS ALL ABOUT ...
BUT I DON'T EVEN WANT TO KNOW!
IT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH ME ANYWAY!
HAMII
WOULD YOU LIKE SOME SOYBEAN PULP, MR MOTO-HIKO?
HUH?
...HE'S GONE, MOTO-HIKO.
IF YOU'RE THE SHA-DOW PEOPLE OR WHAT-EVER, THEN WHY SHOULD I CARE?
SKRITCH
JUST SHUT UP ALREADY ...

POP
FEELING UNDER THE WEATHER ?
!!
MAN, WHAT'S WRONG WITH ME ...?
DID I GET SOME KIND OF SERIOUS DISEASE?
IT'S THE SAME ...
AS YEST-ERDAY ...
UGH ...!


SINCE AROUND THE TIME YOU MET UP WITH THEM ...
YOU FELT BAD YESTERDAY TOO, RIGHT?
THE LITTLE ONE CAME TOO...
WH..
WHY ARE YOU FOLLOWING ME?!


I THOUGHT IT WAS ABOUT TIME YOU STARTED FEELING IT AGAIN, SO I FOLLOWED YOU...
IF YOU'LL EXCUSE MY FORWARDNESS
I GAVE YOU A SERUM YESTERDAY, BUT ...
I HAVE A LITTLE EXPERIENCE IN MEDICINE ...
D...
DO YOU KNOW SOMETHING ABOUT THIS?!

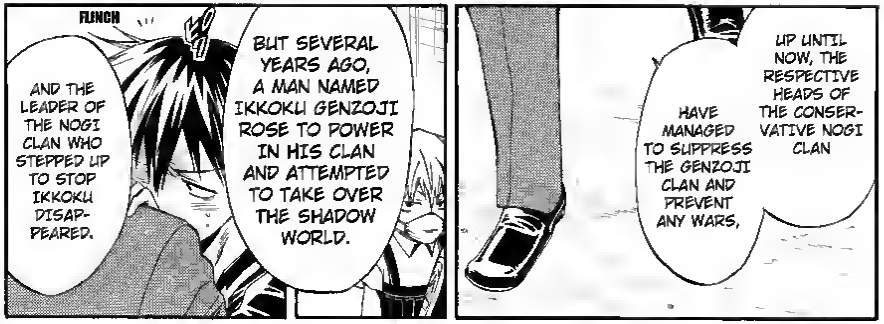
...!
AFTER I FINISH.
HOW ABOUT I ADMINISTER THE SERUM AFTER I FINISH?
...OF COURSE, I STILL HAVE A WAY TO GO IN MY EXPLANATION UNTIL I REACH THAT PART...



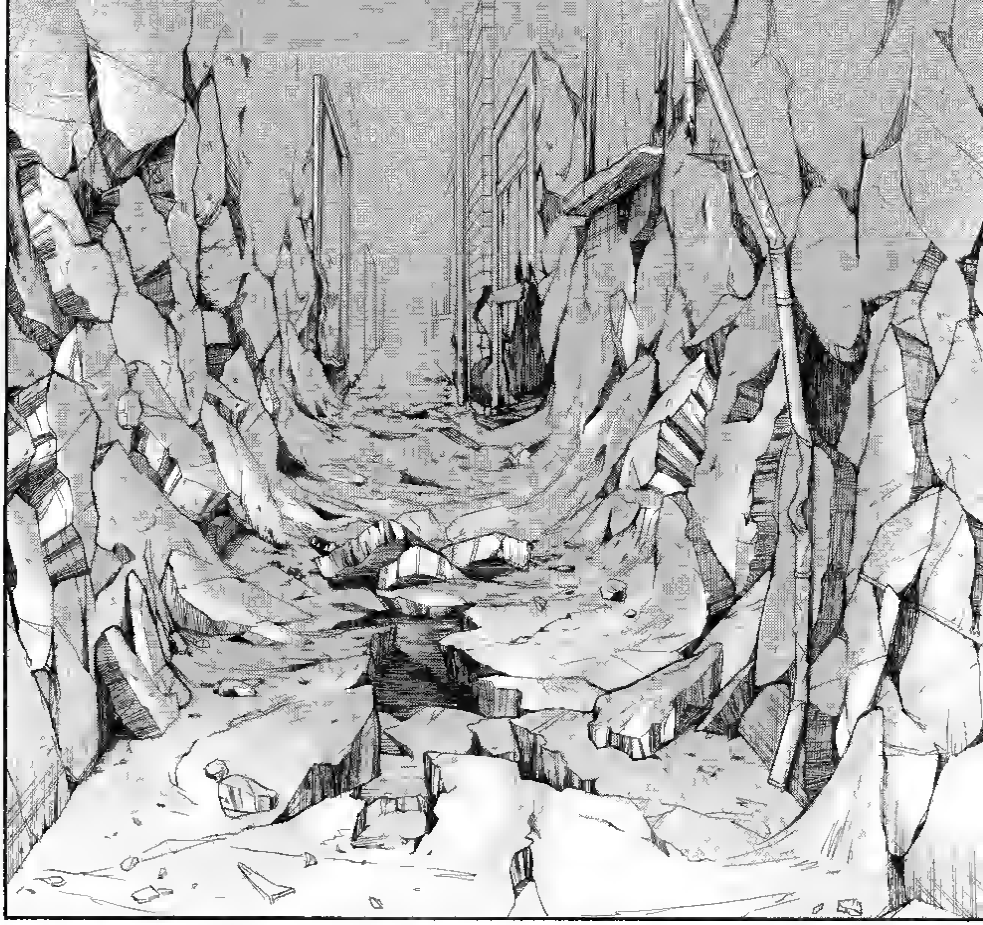
SIGN: CHINESE RESTAURANT

SIGN: TEAHOUSE

THERE WAS THE NOGI CLAN, WHO WISHED TO CONTINUE LIVING AMONG THE SHADOWS AS ALWAYS,
AND THE GENZOJI CLAN, WHO WISHED TO USE THEIR POWER TO CONQUER THE LIGHT WORLD.


FLINCH
AND THE LEADER OF THE NOGI CLAN WHO STEPPED UP TO STOP IKKOKU DISAPPEARED.
BUT SEVERAL YEARS AGO, A MAN NAMED IKKOKU GENZOJI ROSE TO POWER IN HIS CLAN AND ATTEMPTED TO TAKE OVER THE SHADOW WORLD.
UP UNTIL NOW, THE RESPECTIVE HEADS OF THE CONSERVATIVE NOGI CLAN HAVE MANAGED TO SUPPRESS THE GENZOJI CLAN AND PREVENT ANY WARS,

SHOOP
WE NOGI HAVE NOW SCATTERED ACROSS THE LAND, AND ARE LIVING IN SECRECY,
CROUCH
THIS .. ISN'T THE WAY TO SCHOOL.
FACED WITH A DECISION OF ALLEGIANCE OR DEATH, THE NOGI CLAN BEGAN TO DROP LIKE FLIES ...
HEY
HEY, STOP!
COUGO
WHEEZ
HUH ...?
WOULD ONCE MORE RISE TO POWER.
ONLY THAT THE LEADER OF OUR CLAN
WISH-ING
NOW LOOK.
WHEW...
WOW
SUDDENLY I FEEL SO MUCH BETTER.



YOU DID THIS.
WHAT?!

...
WHAT THE ..

YOU DON'T REMEMBER, DO YOU?
YOU WERE UNCONSCIOUS LONG BEFORE IT HAPPENED, SO I CAN'T BLAME YOU.
THEREFORE, ALLOW ME
TO TEACH YOU
ABOUT WHAT YOU DID.
CRACKLE

WH...
TREMBLE
WHAT ...
QUAKE
WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU?!

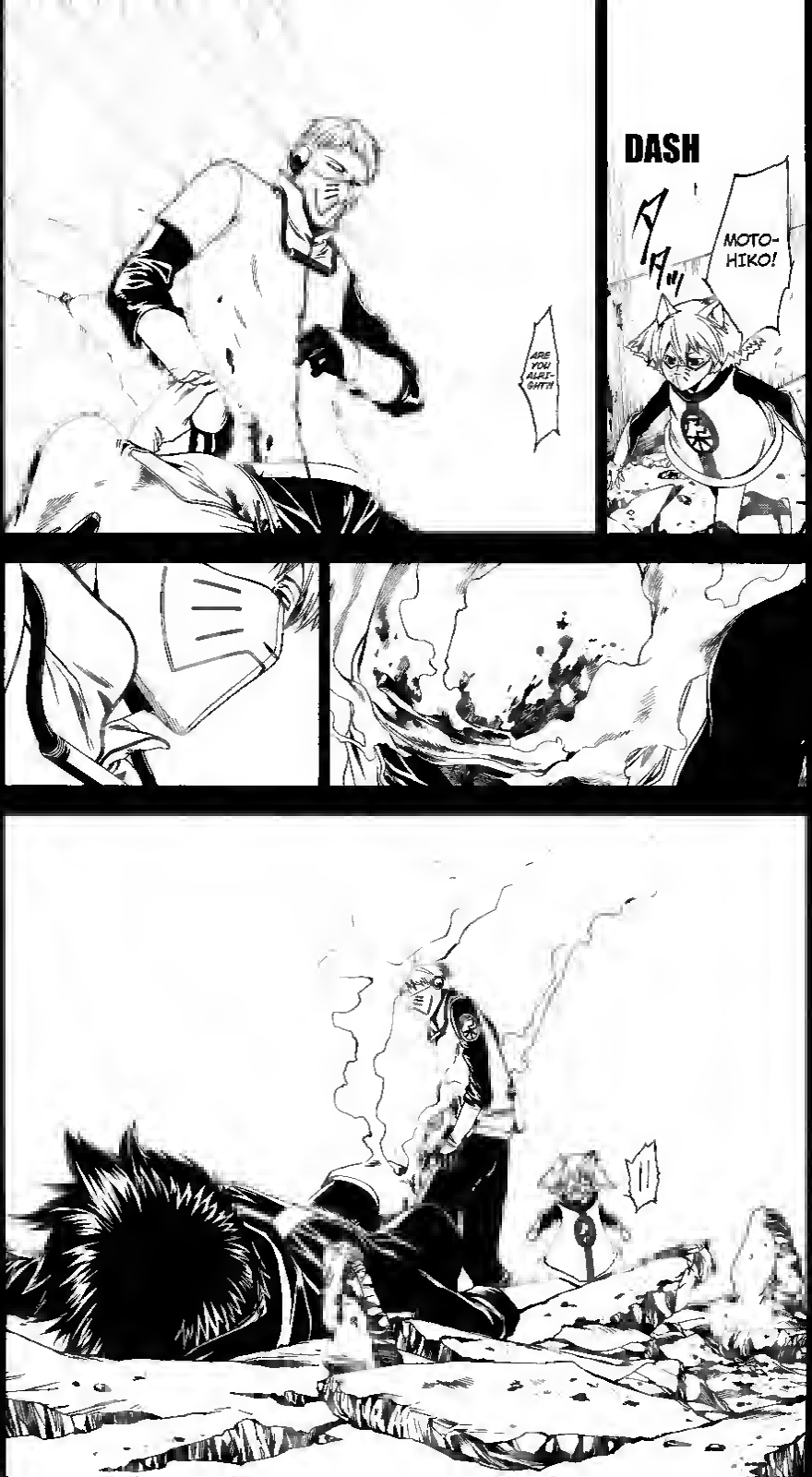
GSH
CRACKLE
!!
GSH
LEAP
GYAGYAGYAGYAH

SLASH
GYAH...!
GYAAHH
AGH...
GUH...
AHHH
AHHHH!
GYAAAAAHHH

DON'T WORRY, I'LL MAKE SURE YOU DON'T DIE.
...!
I HAVE SEVERAL QUESTIONS TO ASK YOU, ANYWAY.
GGGGYAAAAHHH
GYAAAAAHHH...!!
?!
WE MAY HAVE REBELLED...
BUT WE HAVEN'T THROWN AWAY ALL OF OUR PRIDE AS SHADOW BEINGS.
... WHAT DO YOU TAKE ME FOR?
THEN IS THE POWER WE FORCED OUT JUST GOING BERSERK ON ITS OWN?
IF HE'S UNCONSCIOUS ...

FSSSSH...
BESI-DES..
MY BODY'S USE-LESS NOW.
TO PERISH AND LEAVE NOT A SINGLE TRACE ...
THAT'S WHAT IT MEANS TO BE OF THE SHAD-OWS
SHISHIKAKU! THAT'S THE BOY WE'RE AFTER!
TAKE HIM BACK TO THE HQ!
GREE
GRAB

CLICK
...
...!
BOOM


ARE YOU ALRI-GHT?!
DASH
MOTO-HIKO!

WHILE YOU WERE UNCONSCIOUS,
A PORTION OF YOUR HIDDEN ABILITIES WAS UNLEASHED.

UH...
IS THIS SOME KIND OF JOKE?
I DON'T GET IT...
WE BOTH SAW IT WITH OUR OWN EYES...
THAT'S THE ONLY REASON WHY WE'VE HUNG AROUND YOU THIS LONG.

AND EVEN THOUGH IT PROBABLY ONLY APPEARED DUE TO YOUR SURVIVAL INSTINCT,
LOOK WHAT IT ENDED UP DOING.

WE CAME TO THIS WORLD
TO SEARCH FOR A NEW HEIR TO THE NOGI CLAN AND RESTORE ITS GLORY.

THAT POWER EXISTS ONLY WITHIN BLOOD RELATIVES OF THE NOGI CLAN, THE TRUE RULERS OF THE SHADOW WORLD.

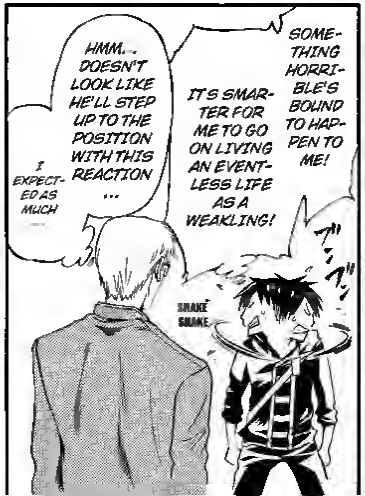
ONE WHO BEARS THE BLOOD OF OUR MISSING LEADER,
A DIRECT SON WHO IS MORE QUALIFIED THAN ANY OTHER TO LEAD THE CLAN.
THAT'S YOU.
...
I..
I DID THIS..?

I'M SO AWE-SOME!!
...AWE-SOME...

...WAIT.
THERE'S NO WAY HAVING POWER LIKE THIS COULD LEAD TO A SAFE, PEACEFUL LIFE!
EH-THUMP

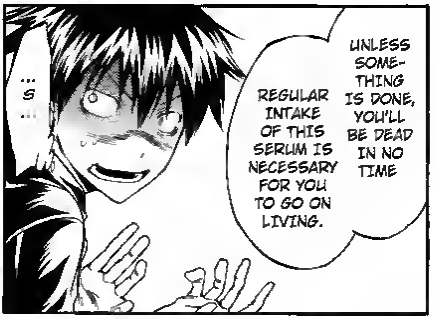
THOSE THUGS DON'T STAND A CHANCE AGAINST ME NOW ...
OR MAYBE I'M THE STRONGEST PERSON IN THE WORLD?! I'LL NEVER HAVE TO BOW TO ANYONE ELSE EVER AGAIN!
?
GUH-GUH-GUH

BUT
YOUR POWER HAS SOME SIDE-EFFECTS


I EXPECTED AS MUCH ...
HMM... DOESN'T LOOK LIKE HE'LL STEP UP TO THE POSITION WITH THIS REACTION ...
IT'S SMARTER FOR ME TO GO ON LIVING AN EVENTLESS LIFE AS A WEAKLING!
SOMETHING HORRIBLE'S BOUND TO HAPPEN TO ME!
SHAKE SHAKE

WHEN YOUR POWER AWAKENED, SO DID A DISEASE THAT IS NOW IN THE PROCESS OF EATING AWAY AT YOUR BODY.
JUDGING FROM WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING TO YOU SINCE YESTERDAY, IT SHOULD MAKE SENSE.

SEE, I TOLD YOU!! HAVING POWER IS A BAD THING AFTER ALL!
BUT
YOU NEED NOT WORRY
I'LL ADMINISTER THE SERUM TO YOU FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE.
WHAT?!


...S...
UNLESS SOMETHING IS DONE, YOU'LL BE DEAD IN NO TIME
REGULAR INTAKE OF THIS SERUM IS NECESSARY FOR YOU TO GO ON LIVING.

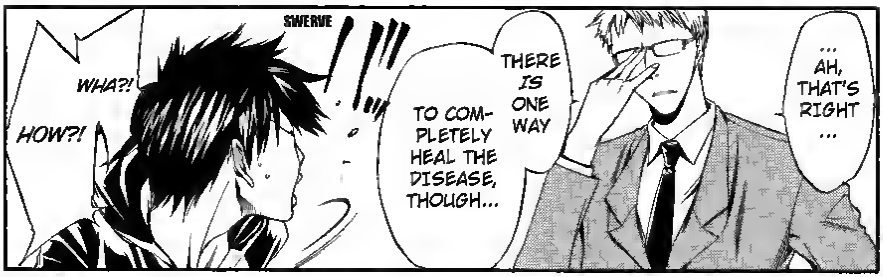
...HM?
AND EXACTLY HOW WILL THAT BENEFIT ME?

...NO,
NO, THAT'S WAY TOO MUCH TO ASK OF YOU.
JUST, UH... JUST LEAVE THE SERUM HERE, AND I'LL TAKE CARE OF IT MYSELF...

THIS IS ALL, OF COURSE, UNDER THE PRESUMPTION THAT YOU'LL RISE TO BECOME THE NEW LEADER OF THE NOGI CLAN.
THIS SERUM ISN'T FREE, YOU KNOW.
THERE WOULD BE NO POINT IN WASTING IT ON YOU UNLESS YOU WERE THE LEADER OF OUR CLAN.

THIS IS ALL JUST A HUGE LIE!
...
YES ...
LOOM
IT WON'T INCONVEN-IENCE US ONE BIT!
YOU'RE UTTERLY USE-LESS!
...!
IF THAT'S THE CASE, THEN WHO CARES IF YOU DIE?
WH...
WHAT A BASTARD ...!
I SUPPOSE IT WOULD BE FUN TO WATCH THOUGH.
HAHAHAHA...

HE ONLY FEELS BAD TODAY BECAUSE I INJECTED MORE POISON INTO HIM.
TODAY, BEFORE HE WOKE UP...
WE GAVE HIM ANOTHER SHOT OF THE POISON.
NNN...
IT'S JUST A LITTLE INSURANCE, AND IT'S WORTH IT...
IF IT'LL GET HIM TO COOPERATE...
AND IF IT'LL HELP HIM UNLEASH THE REST OF HIS POWER.

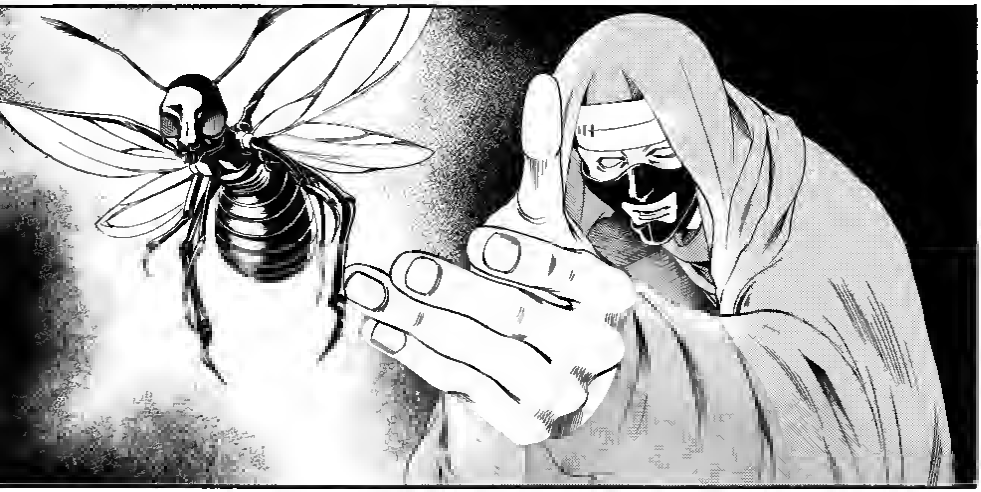

... AH, THAT'S RIGHT ...
THERE IS ONE WAY TO COMPLETELY HEAL THE DISEASE, THOUGH...
SWERVE
WHA?!
HOW?!

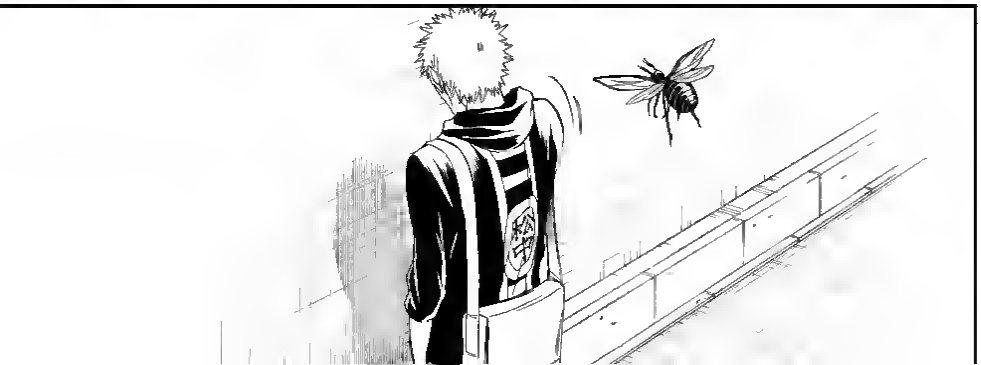
ALL YOU NEED TO DO IS USE YOUR POWER UP.

THE MORE YOU FIGHT AT FULL STRENGTH,
THE MORE YOU'LL USE UP YOUR POWER, EVENTUALLY LOSING IT ALTOGETHER.
MURMUR
...THE DISEASE WILL DISAPPEAR ALONG WITH IT.
ALL YOU NEED TO DO.. IS FIGHT.
... OF COURSE,
THIS IS ALSO
A TOTAL LIE.
THE STRONGER THE ENEMY,
THE BETTER.
THINK ABOUT IT! BOYS ALL OVER THE WORLD DREAM NIGHT AFTER NIGHT ABOUT HAVING THIS KIND OF POWER!
HEY! HOW LONG ARE YOU GOING TO FOLLOW ME FOR?
I'M ALMOST AT SCHOOL
DASH
AH !!
NO WAY !!
NO WAY !
THEN SHE WAS LIKE ..
HEE HEE HEE

STU-
DENTS
FROM
HIS
SCH-
OOL
...
RUSTLE
YOU ALREADY GOT SOME FUTURE PLAN LAID OUT FOR YOUR-SELF?
DAMN ...
I'LL JUST DO IT AROUND HERE SOMEWHERE
HEY,
HOLD UP. I GOTTA PISS.
WHAT THE HELL IS WRONG WITH THAT CHICK?
HEH'
"I'M TRANS-FORMING INTO A GOD NOW, SO CALL ME BACK LATER."
I WANNA BECOME FAMOUS FOR PISSING IN THE STREET 1000 TIMES BEFORE I DIE.
NAH.
WE'RE ALMOST AT SCHOOL, WHY DON'T YOU JUST USE A TOILET THERE?

SIGN: MIYAKOYA





CRINGE
SQUIRM
... HN?!
HUH ... A BUG ...?
!!
TWITCH!!
CLAMOR
WHAT'S GOING ON —?
SMELLS LIKE YOUTH!
SO THIS IS A MIDDLE SCHOOL!
GO AWAY PLEASE?
WAAAH!
WAAAH!
THAT'S REALLY COOL, BUT IT'S ALSO REALLY DANGER-OUS!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING, YOKO-CHIN?!

SHUD-
DAP,
MAG-
GOTS!
OUTTA
THE
WAY!!
SHOW
YOUR-
SELF
!!
SON
OF
NOGI
!!
!!

KEE
KEE
KEE
KEE
I KNOW YOU'RE DOWN THERE ...
I'M SURE OF IT!
DON'T THINK YOU CAN HIDE FOR-EVER!
SKRITCH SKRATCH
WAAAH! WAAAH!
G... GET DOWN HERE THIS INST-ANT!
HUMANS AREN'T SUP-POSED TO DO THINGS LIKE THAT!
TEACHER!
WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT, YOKO-CHIN?!
OOOH.
HE'S BEING CONT-ROLLED BY THE GENZOJI CLAN.
THIS IS A POSS-ESSION TECH-NIQUE.
UNLESS YOU WANT THAT GIRL TO DIE!

WE KID-NAPPED HER BY ACCI-DENT,
BUT DON'T THINK WE'LL JUST LET HER GO!
NOW SHOW YOUR-SELF ...
AND COME TO US ...

GEHA GEHAGEHA
GOT IT?!
BOO OOO OOY!

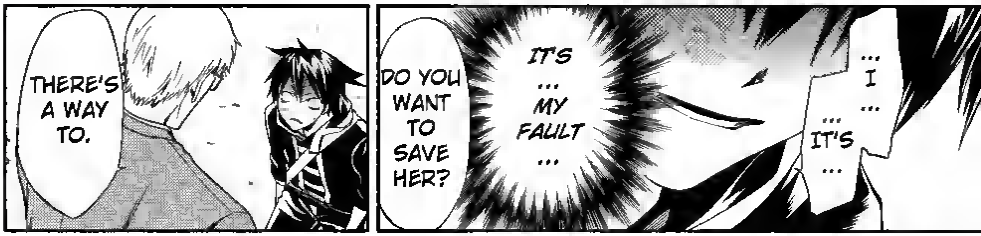
SLIP...
!!
GEHA...
...
C'MON, GRAB MY HAND!
C'MERE, YOKO-CHIN!
GEHAHA
SERI-OUSLY, YOKO-CHIN, CUT IT OUT!
YOU AREN'T MAK-ING ANY SENSE!
AND WHAT'S WITH THAT GRIN?!
GEHA GEHA

CATCH
DASH
AHHHH! YOKO-CHIN!!
IT HARDLY EVEN FEELS LIKE I'M HOLDING ANYTHING!
WOW! HE'S SO LIGHT!
YOKO-CHIN'S SO COOL!
CHEERS
THAT WAS AWESOME, MAN!
WHO IS THAT?!
...W
WOO AAA HHH!!
HE CAUGHT HIM!
CHEERS
FLORT
HUH?!
...!

AH,
THAT'S RIGHT.
I FORGOT TO TELL YOU.
HE... WAS TALKING ABOUT KAZU, WASN'T HE?
YOKO-CHIN!
HUH... WHAT THE ...
YOU'RE SO AWE-SOME, YOKO-CHIIIN!
CLAMOR
...H
HOW COULD I FOR-GET ...

YESTER-DAY, THE TWO MON-STERS
MIS-UNDER-STOOD THE ORDER THEIR MASTER GAVE BEFORE HE DIED
AND TOOK THAT GIRL TO THE GENZOJI HIDEOUT INSTEAD OF YOU.
... WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN TO HER?
FOR NOW, IT LOOKS LIKE THEY PLAN TO USE HER TO LURE YOU OUT.

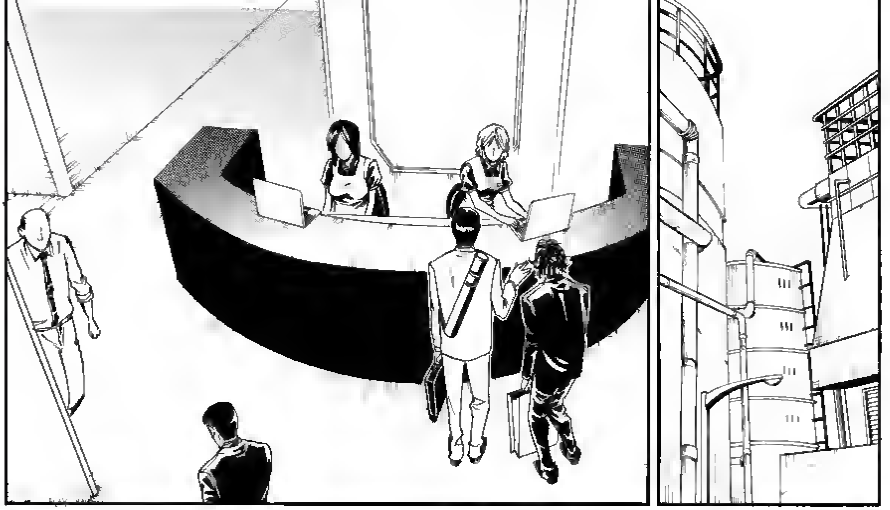
BUT IF SHE DOESN'T SERVE HER PUR-POSE
THEN SHE WILL BE KILLED.

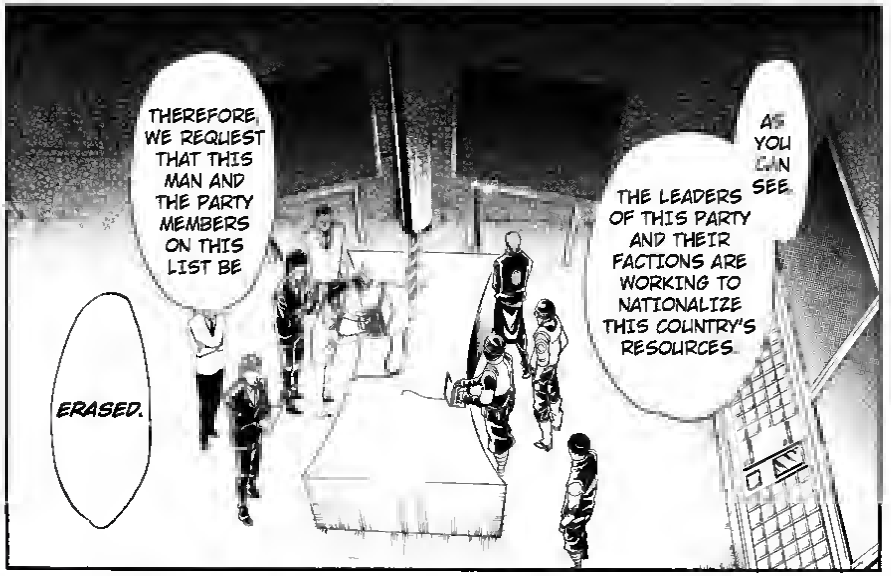

... I ... IT'S ...
IT'S ... MY FAULT ...
DO YOU WANT TO SAVE HER?
THERE'S A WAY TO.

SIMPLY ACKNOW-LEDGE YOURSELF AS LEADER OF THE NOGI CLAN.
THEN GIVE US ORDERS.
WE ARE EVER AWAITING YOUR COMMANDS.

DON'T FOLLOW ME, KEN...
JUST THIS ONE TIME, IN ORDER TO SAVE KAZU!
ONLY ONCE!

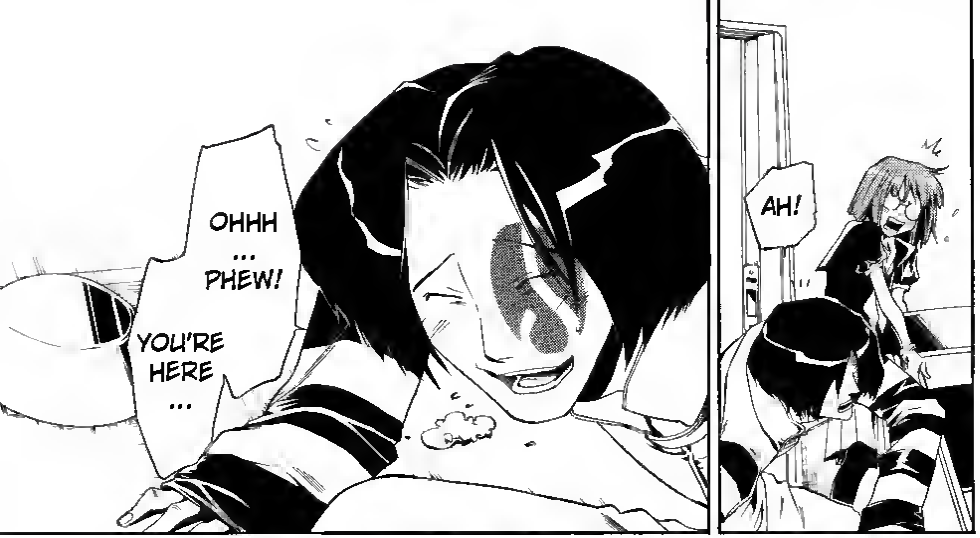
AS YOUR LEADER,
I ORDER YOU!
SAVE KAZU!
WITH PLEA-SURE, MY LORD.




AS YOU CAN SEE,
THE LEADERS OF THIS PARTY AND THEIR FACTIONS ARE WORKING TO NATIONALIZE THIS COUNTRY'S RESOURCES.
THEREFORE, WE REQUEST THAT THIS MAN AND THE PARTY MEMBERS ON THIS LIST BE
ERASED.

CHAK
?!
NOW, MOVING ON TO THE NEXT ITEM ...
BY THE 16TH OF NEXT MONTH, PLEASE.
ROGER.

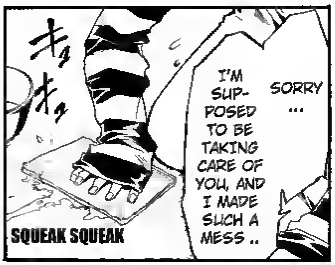
HUH?!
SLIP
SWING
S..
SHE'S GONE!
CLANG!!
...GH!


OHHH ... PHEW!
YOU'RE HERE ...
AH!

...

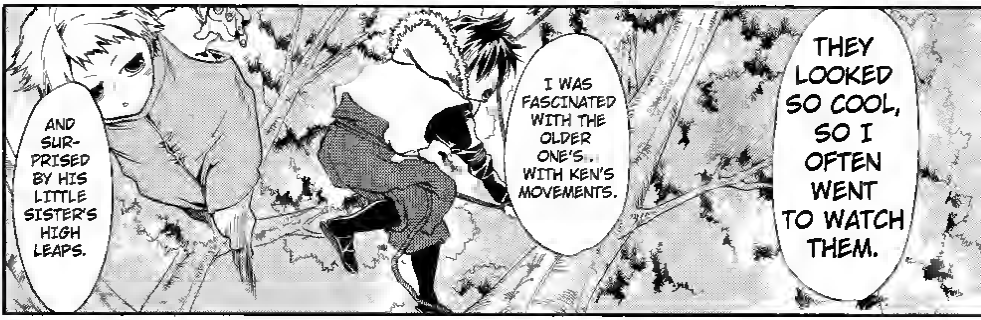
HUH ...
FOR-GET IT.
DON'T APOLO-GIZE SO MUCH. AND I'M NOT HUN-GRY ANY-WAY.

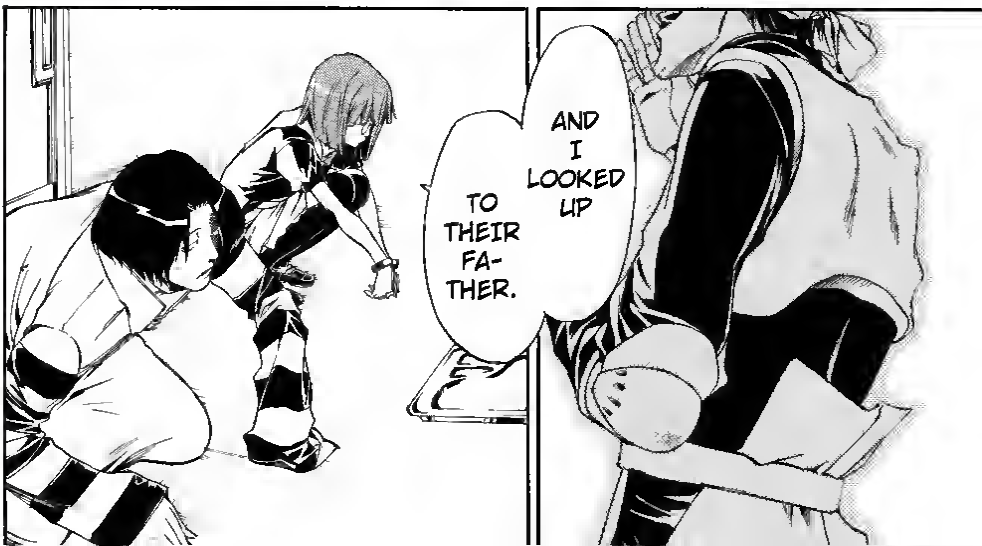
SORRY FOR TYING YOU UP LIKE THAT.
THAT MUST HURT, HUH ...?
...AND I'M REALLY SORRY ABOUT THE FOOD.


SQUEAK SQUEAK
I'M SUP-POSED TO BE TAKING CARE OF YOU, AND I MADE SUCH A MESS ..
SORRY ...

BESIDES ... YOUR HANDS ARE TIED!
OH NO, DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT! THIS IS MY FAULT ...

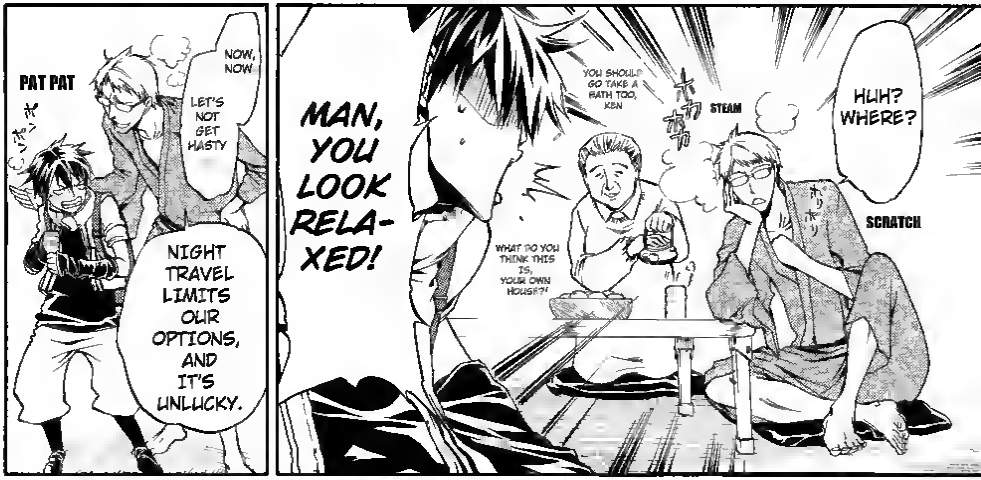
...I'VE ALWAYS BEEN A KLUTZ ...
AND PEOPLE ALWAYS SAID MY GRANDMA SPOILED ME.
I WAS THE SAME WAY.
EVERY SUMMER VACATION, I WENT TO MY GRANDMA'S HOUSE DEEP IN THE MOUNTAINS
...THERE WERE OTHER PEOPLE IN THOSE MOUNTAINS, TOO.
ALWAYS DOING SOME SORT OF TRAINING.
A FATHER AND TWO YOUNG SIBLINGS ...


THEY LOOKED SO COOL, SO I OFTEN WENT TO WATCH THEM.
I WAS FASCINATED WITH THE OLDER ONE'S WITH KEN'S MOVEMENTS.
AND SURPRISED BY HIS LITTLE SISTER'S HIGH LEAPS.


AND I LOOKED UP TO THEIR FATHER.

OH, IT'S KAZU!
HE CAME WITH "GRANDMA" I HAD NEVER SEEN BEFORE.
ONE DAY, A BOY SUDDENLY MOVED IN TO THE TOWN WHERE MY PARENTS AND I LIVED.
I WONDER IF HIS FATHER'S STILL TRAINING ...
WITH KEN'S ...
OR ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED TO THE REST OF HIS FAMILY.
KEN DIDN'T SEEM TO KNOW THE DETAILS OF HIS MOVE EITHER.
LITTLE SISTER ...

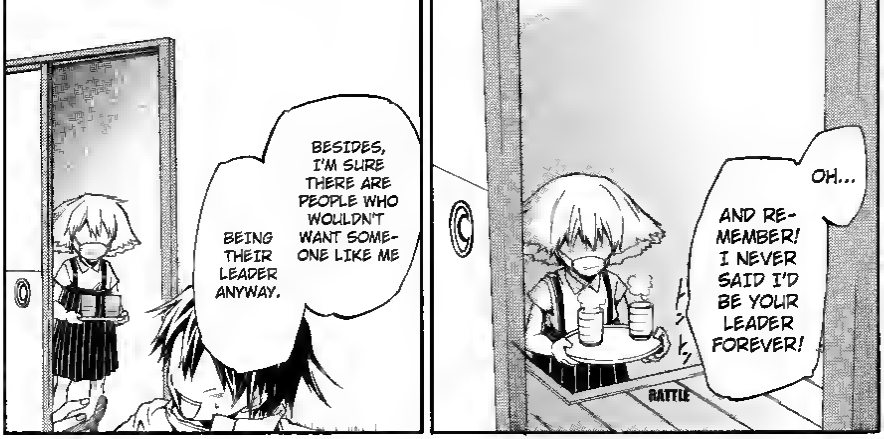
IF WE'RE GONNA GO, THEN LET'S GO ALREADY!
C'MON!
RUSTLE

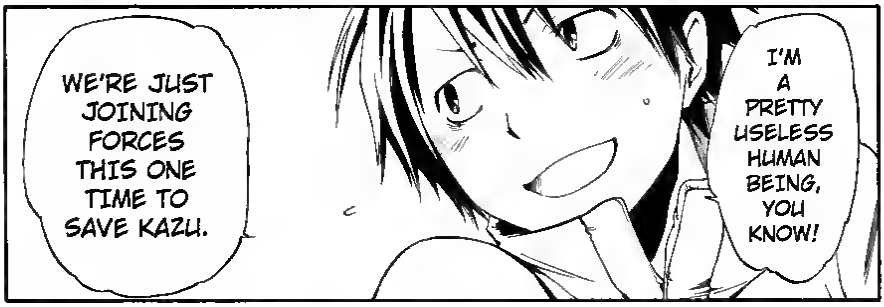

PAT PAT
NOW, NOW
LET'S NOT GET HASTY
NIGHT TRAVEL LIMITS OUR OPTIONS, AND IT'S UNLUCKY.
MAN, YOU LOOK RELA-XED!
YOU SHOULD GO TAKE A BATH TOO, KEN
STEAM
WHAT DO YOU THINK THIS IS, YOUR OWN HOUSE?!
HUH? WHERE?
SCRATCH

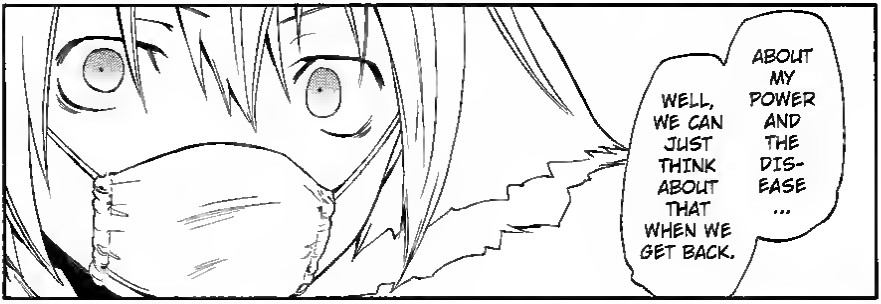
TOUCH...
BUT WE SHOULD REALLY WAIT FOR MORN-ING.
I'M HAPPY TO SEE YOUR ENTHU-SIASM,

... CONSTANT INSURANCE IS NECESSARY.
SO HE'S ENTHUSIASTIC ENOUGH ON HIS OWN WITHOUT US HAVING TO THREATEN HIM.
HIS NEWFOUND POWER IS GIVING HIM A HIGH RIGHT NOW.
JUST NEED TO HAVE THIS BUG KEEP INJECTING THE DRUG

DON'T YOU WANT TO SAY GOODBYE TO YOUR FRIENDS AT SCHOOL?
WHAT, WHY?
I'LL BE BACK IN NO TIME.
... STILL, YOU SEEM ALMOST TOO READY TO LEAVE.
... IS THAT FOR THE TWO OF THEM?
POUR...
...I'LL TAKE IT IN.


BESIDES, I'M SURE THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO WOULDN'T WANT SOMEONE LIKE ME BEING THEIR LEADER ANYWAY.
OH... AND REMEMBER! I NEVER SAID I'D BE YOUR LEADER FOREVER!
RATTLE


WE'RE JUST JOINING FORCES THIS ONE TIME TO SAVE KAZU.
I'M A PRETTY USELESS HUMAN BEING, YOU KNOW!


WELL, WE CAN JUST THINK ABOUT THAT WHEN WE GET BACK.
ABOUT MY POWER AND THE DISEASE ...

WHO KNOWS, MY POWER MIGHT EVEN BE GONE ONCE I COME HOME.
I MEAN, COME ON ...

SPLASH
TWITCH
ANOTHER PAIN ...
MOTSU !!

WHAT'S YOUR PROB-LEM?!
...I REFUSE TO ACCEPT YOU.
... YOU'RE SO PATH-ETIC ...
WHAT ARE YOU DOING ?!
...
FSSSH
...
HUH ...

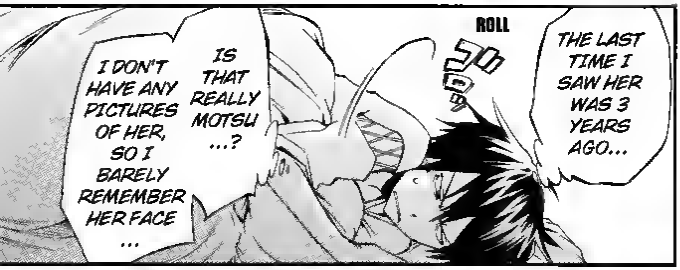
YOU'LL NEVER BE ABLE TO REPLACE DAD...
I DON'T EVEN CONSIDER YOU MY TRUE BROTHER !!

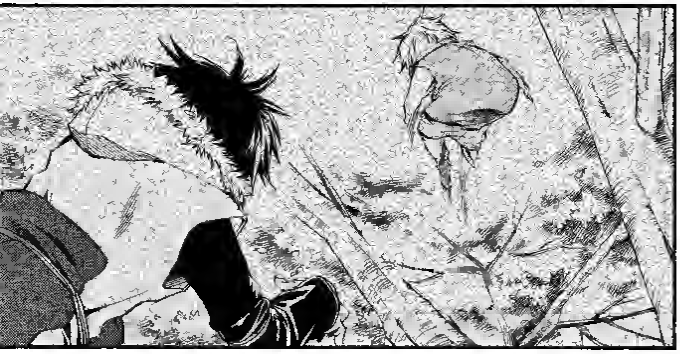
WHAT ?!

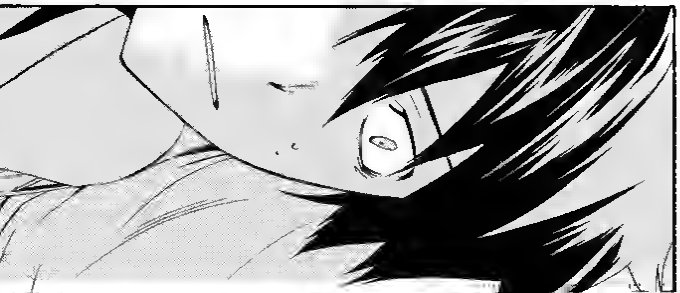
YOU JUST REAL-IZED THIS NOW?
!!
I'M REALLY SURPRISED
YEAH!
...
B... BRO-THER ?!
WAIT, DID YOU JUST SAY MOTSU?!
MOTSU NOGI.
WHO YOU LIVED TOGETHER WITH UP UNTIL 3 YEARS AGO,
THIS IS YOUR ONE AND ONLY SISTER,
I JUST FIGURED I'D NEVER SEE HER AGAIN...
AFTER I MOVED, SHE NEVER GOT IN TOUCH WITH ME...
B... BUT ...
...

I DON'T REMEMBER DOING ANYTHING BAD TO HER...
CRINGE
WHAT'S WRONG WITH HER?!
THEN WHY DID SHE THROW TEA AT ME AND YELL THAT I'M NOT HER REAL BROTHER?!
.. IF SHE'S MY SISTER,
AND MOTSU MAY ATTACK YOU FROM BEHIND AGAIN,
YOU TWO MAY HAVE RATHER COMPLI-CATED FEELINGS ABOUT ONE ANOTHER,
HERE'S THE SERUM.
AH, AN-OTHER SPASM.
... UGH ...
THE HELL IT IS!
CLICK
BUT THAT'S JUST ONE OF THE WAYS SHE SHOWS HER LOVE-
SSSSS...
SCALDING SOMEONE WITH TEA IS PRAC-TICALLY ASSAULT, YOU KNOW

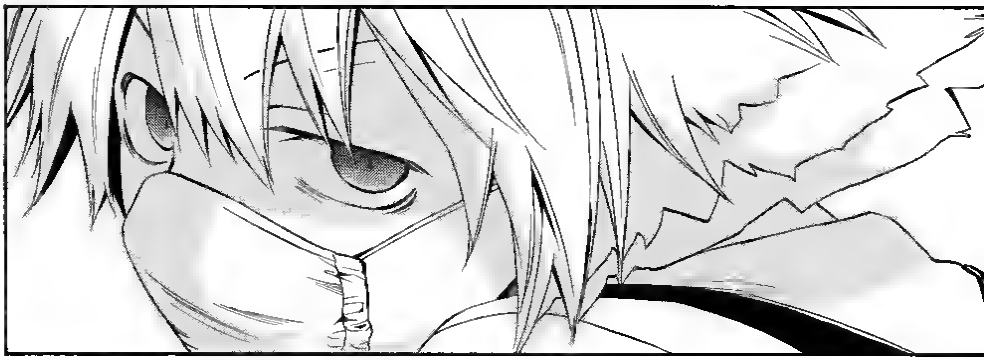
IT'S LIKE SHE WANTS TO KILL ME OR SOMETHING!
I CAN'T BE-LIEVE THIS.
WHY ME...? IS SHE JEALOUS OF MY POWER OR SOME-THING?


I DON'T HAVE ANY PICTURES OF HER, SO I BARELY REMEMBER HER FACE ...
IS THAT REALLY MOTSU ...?
ROLL
THE LAST TIME I SAW HER WAS 3 YEARS AGO...

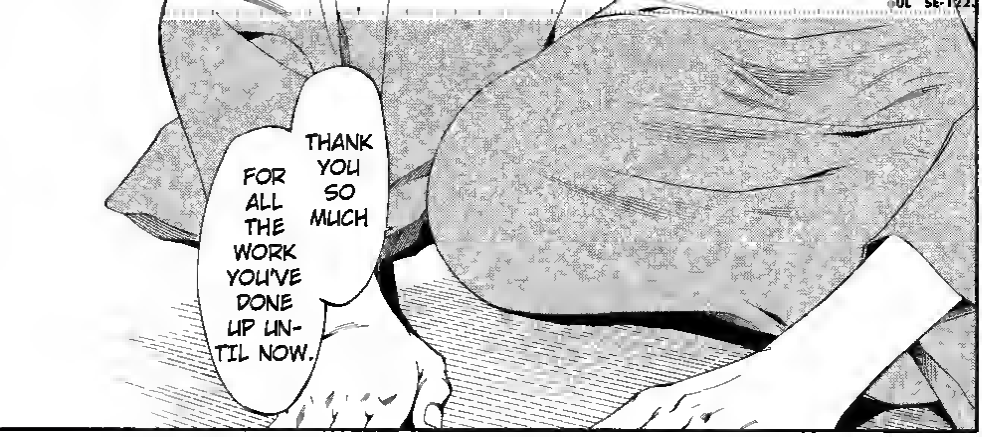




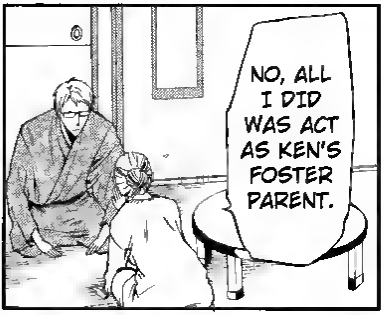
...THAT MARK ON HIS WRIST ...
IS HIS BODY IN THE PRO-CESS OF MAKING A MERIDIAN TO CHANNEL HIS POWER...?

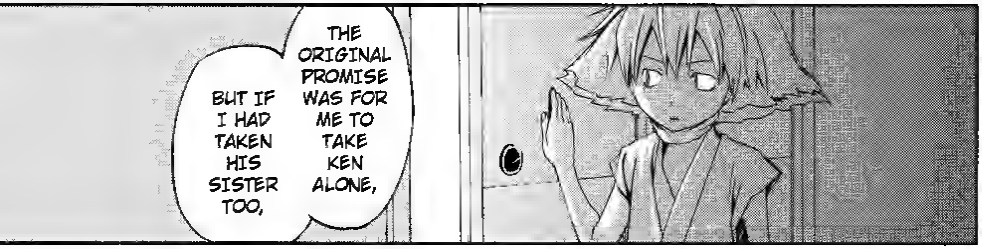


IT'S THE FIRST TIME IN 3 YEARS ..
ISN'T SHE HAPPY TO SEE ME?
...I'M EVEN MORE CONFU-SED NOW.
...
...THIS SUCKS
...
...
トボトボ


THANK YOU SO MUCH
FOR ALL THE WORK YOU'VE DONE UP UNTIL NOW.

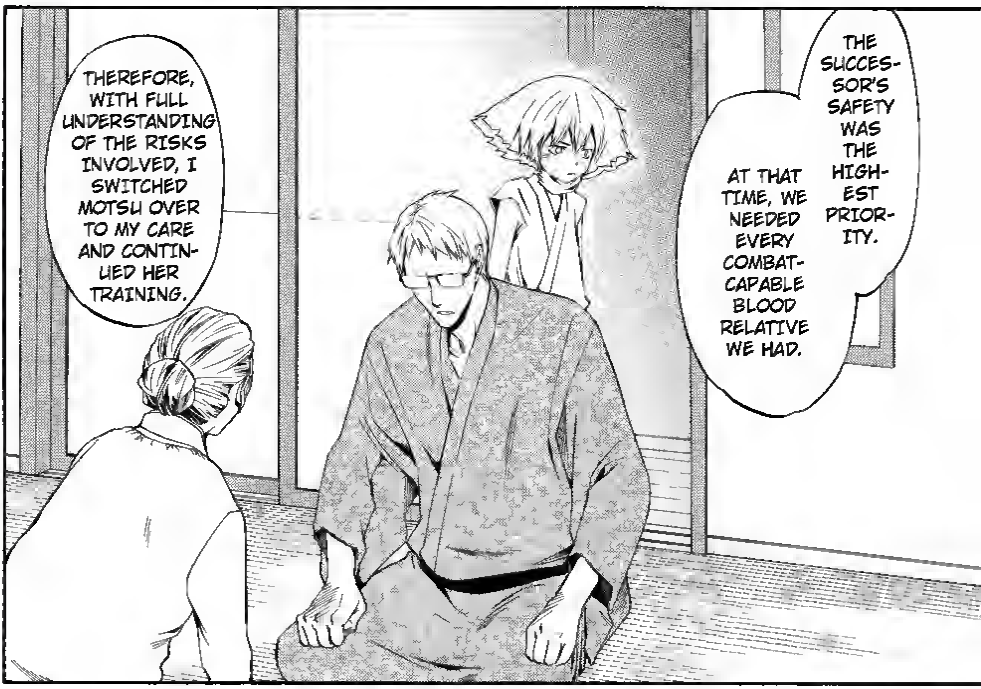
KEN WAS KIND ENOUGH TO ACCEPT ME AS HIS REAL GRANDMOTHER,
SO I HOPED HE COULD GO ON LIVING HERE IN PEACE ...


NO, ALL I DID WAS ACT AS KEN'S FOSTER PARENT.


THE ORIGINAL PROMISE WAS FOR ME TO TAKE KEN ALONE,
BUT IF I HAD TAKEN HIS SISTER TOO,

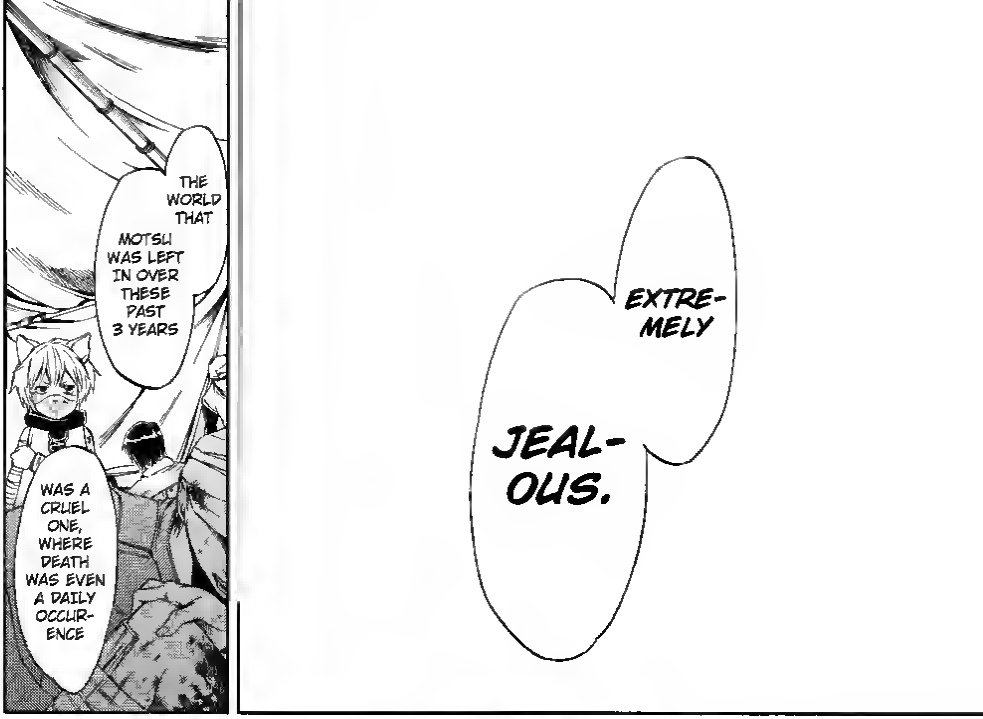
THEN SHE PROBABLY...
WOULDN'T HAVE GROWN TO HATE HIM SO MUCH.

WE REGISTERED KEN, THE NEXT IN LINE, UNDER YOUR FAMILY... IN ORDER TO KEEP THE GENZOJI CLAN AWAY.
MIDST THE CHAOS THAT ERUPTED AFTER ZUIEKI DISAPPEARED 3 YEARS AGO,


THEREFORE, WITH FULL UNDERSTANDING OF THE RISKS INVOLVED, I SWITCHED MOTSU OVER TO MY CARE AND CONTINUED HER TRAINING.
AT THAT TIME, WE NEEDED EVERY COMBAT-CAPABLE BLOOD RELATIVE WE HAD.
THE SUCCESSOR'S SAFETY WAS THE HIGHEST PRIORITY.

SHE WAS FORCED TO LIVE IN THE SHADOWS.
HOWEVER,

SHE DEEPLY UNDERSTANDS THE WRETCHED STATE OF THE CLAN, AND THE IMPORTANCE OF NOGI BLOOD.
AND IT'S BECAUSE SHE UNDERSTANDS HER OWN POSITION SO WELL
THAT SHE CAN'T FORGIVE HER IGNORANT, THOUGHTLESS BROTHER.
... IF YOU KNOW THAT ...
GRIT
IF YOU KNOW THAT MUCH, THEN WHY DON'T YOU MAKE KEN UNDERSTAND?!
BETTER HIM! BEAT THE PAIN OF THE NOGI CLAN INTO HIS BODY AND MAKE HIM UNDERSTAND!
... BUT, THAT'S NOT ALL.
I IMAGINE THAT MOTSU IS SUBCONSCIOUSLY

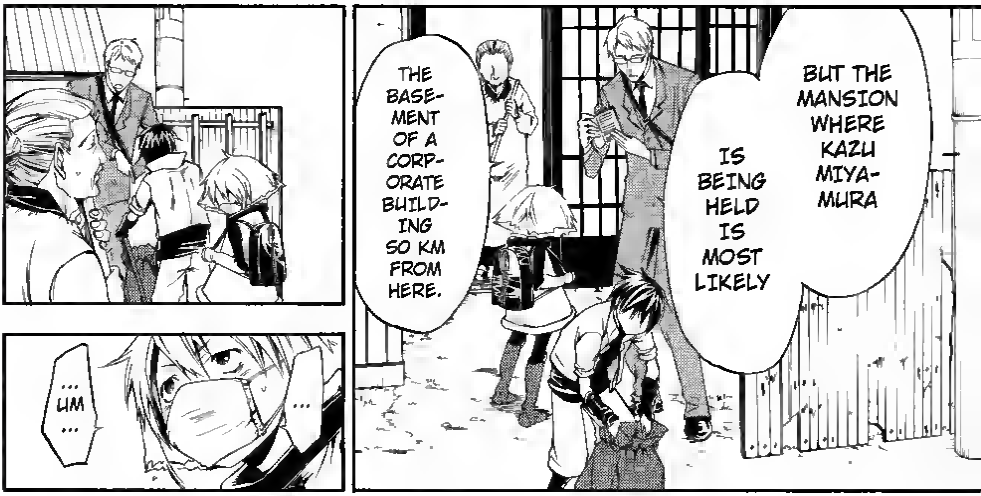

THE WORLD THAT MOTSU WAS LEFT IN OVER THESE PAST 3 YEARS
WAS A CRUEL ONE, WHERE DEATH WAS EVEN A DAILY OCCURRENCE
EXTREMELY
JEALOUS.

WERE THINGS THAT KEN TOOK FOR GRANTED.
EVERYTHING THAT MOTSU COULDN'T HAVE BECAUSE OF HER ENVIRONMENT
FRIENDS, A SCHOOL TO GO TO,
AND A PEACEFUL, MUNDANE LIFE.

IF ONLY ...
I COULD HAVE KEPT HER BACK SOMEHOW...
... YES ...

DRIP
POOR
THING.

THESE BUILDINGS ARE SCATTERED ALL OVER THE PLACE,
THE GEN-ZOJI CLAN USES BUILDINGS BELONGING TO THEIR MOST IMPORTANT SPONSORS AS THEIR HIDEOUTS.


...UM...
...
THE BASE-MENT OF A CORP-ORATE BUILD-ING 50 KM FROM HERE.
BUT THE MANSION WHERE KAZU MIYA-MURA IS BEING HELD IS MOST LIKELY

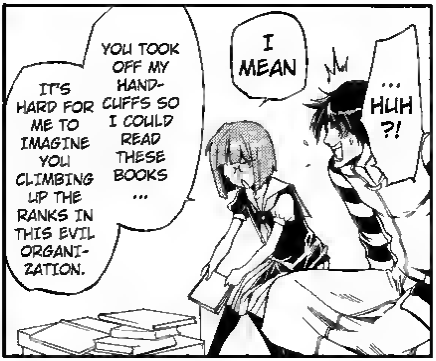
...HMPH.
KEEP AN EYE ON THINGS WHILE I'M GONE.
FLINCH
BYE, GRANDMA!

YOU THINK WE'LL ONLY BE GONE FOR A "LITTLE BIT?"
MUTTER
JERR
HUH?!
W... WE'LL BE BACK HOME IN NO TIME!
LET'S BE OFF, HEIR!
CLACK CLACK
W...
WAIT!

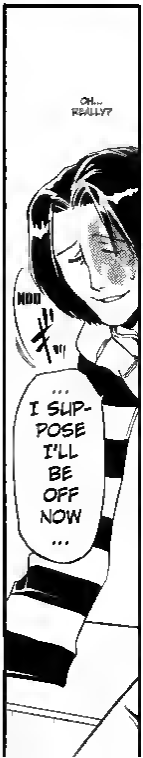
AND SO, THE PRINCE SAVED THE PRINCESS FROM THE ISLAND OF DEMONS
AND RETURNED HER TO THE KINGDOM, WHERE THEY LIVED HAPPILY EVER AFTER.
THE END!
SMACK!
AHH, WHAT A NICE ENDING!
YOU ENDED UP READING IT TO ME ...
THEY'RE GOING TO COME SAVE YOU.
IT'S ALRIGHT.
...
AAAND NEXT

...
YOU'RE REALLY
LOW IN THE RANKS, AREN'T YOU?

YOU'RE JUST TOO NICE.


...
HUH?!
I MEAN
YOU TOOK OFF MY HANDCUFFS SO I COULD READ THESE BOOKS ...
IT'S HARD FOR ME TO IMAGINE YOU CLIMBING UP THE RANKS IN THIS EVIL ORGANIZATION.

WAIT!


OH... REALLY?
NOD
... I SUPPOSE I'LL BE OFF NOW ...

...
HUH?
HAHA, HOLD ON!
DON'T THINK I'M GONNA LET YOU OUT JUST BECAUSE YOU COMPLIMENT ME!
I'M NOT.
BESIDES YOU PROBABLY DON'T EVEN HAVE THAT AUTHORITY.

I'M GLAD YOU WERE MY GUARD.

MUTTER
...
THE PRINCE WILL BE HERE FOR YOU SOON, KAZU.
...
SLAM

VERY SOON.

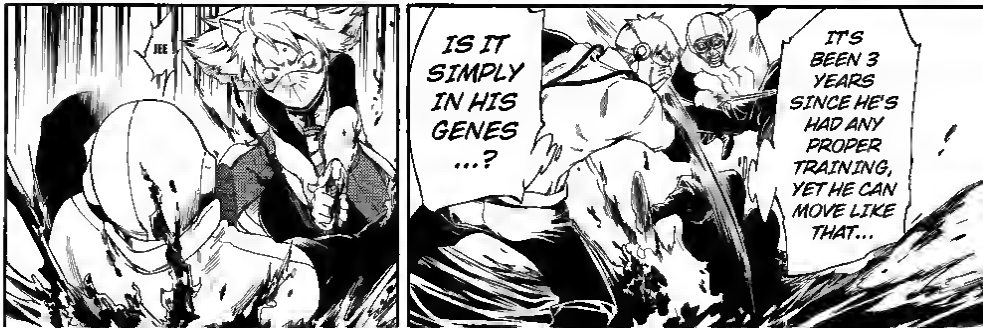
ALL THE BUIL-DINGS AROUND HERE ARE CONNECTED BY THIS SEWER SYSTEM.
GRIP
WE WILL NOW BEGIN
INFIL-TRATION.

I THINK I SORT OF REMEMBER YOU NOW.
...
UMM ...
SPLASH...
SPLASH...
SPLASH...

BE QUIET ...
WE'RE IN GENZOJI TERRITORY NOW.
SPLISH SPLASH...
N...NO, NOT YOU, MOTOHIKO ...
...OH?
BUT UNFORTUNATELY, I HAVE NO MEMORIES OF YOU TO RECALL.
...
JUST HOW IGNORANT ARE YOU OF YOUR HERITAGE?
YOU MEAN YOU ACTUALLY FORGOT THAT?
UHH, WHAT SHOULD I CALL HER BY?
IT SEEMS LIKE "MOTSU" IS A BIT MUCH ...
WE TRAINED TOGETHER, DIDN'T WE?

SWIM...
POP...
?!
SPLISH...
LEAP
AHHH HHH!
JEE JEE JEE JEE
JEE
SPLOSH
SPLASH
GHH!
GUARDS, ALL THE WAY DOWN HERE ...?!
CHINK!!

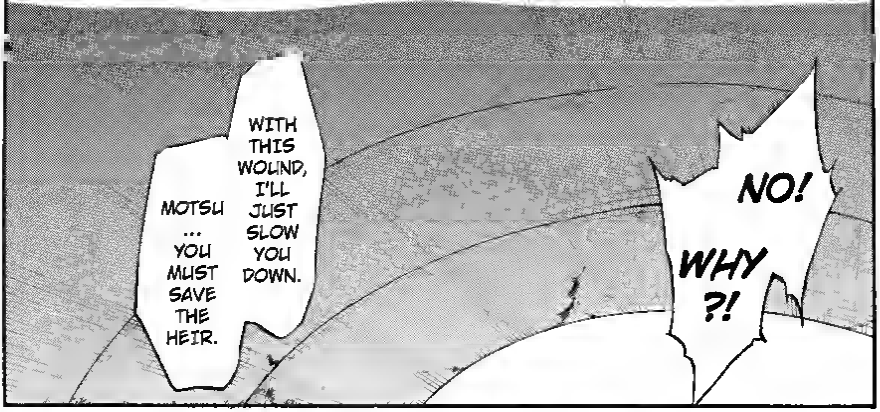
JEE!
BAM
RUN!
WAAA AAAH !!
WHO-OPS!
WOAH!

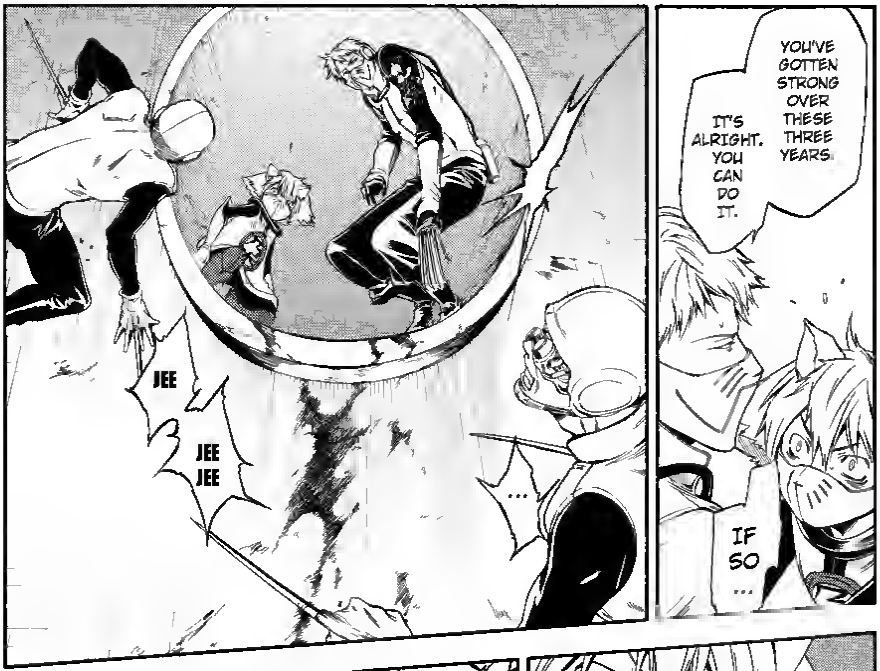

IEE
IS IT SIMPLY IN HIS GENES ...?
IT'S BEEN 3 YEARS SINCE HE'S HAD ANY PROPER TRAINING, YET HE CAN MOVE LIKE THAT...

WHAP
?!
THEIR NUMBERS DROPPED
LET'S DASH THROUGH!
WHOOSH
THIS IS ...
SPLASH
WHAM
!

RIPPLE...
SLICE
HOW ABOUT YOUR END?
BEE- BEE- BEE
YOU LOST SIGHT OF THE BOY AS WELL ...
OH WELL. RETURN TO YOUR POSTS.
FOL- LOW THEM.

MOTO-HIKO?!
...
THROR
LOOKS LIKE THE HEIR GOT AWAY AS WELL...
HE DID A GOOD JOB.
FIND THE HEIR ...
BUFFLE
MOTSU.
THIS IS PROBABLY THE AREA WHERE THAT GIRL'S BEING HELD.
AND GO TOGE-THER
?!


NO!
WHY ?!
WITH THIS WOUND, I'LL JUST SLOW YOU DOWN.
MOTSU ... YOU MUST SAVE THE HEIR.


YOU'VE GOTTEN STRONG OVER THESE THREE YEARS.
IT'S ALRIGHT. YOU CAN DO IT.
IF SO ...
JEE
JEE JEE
...

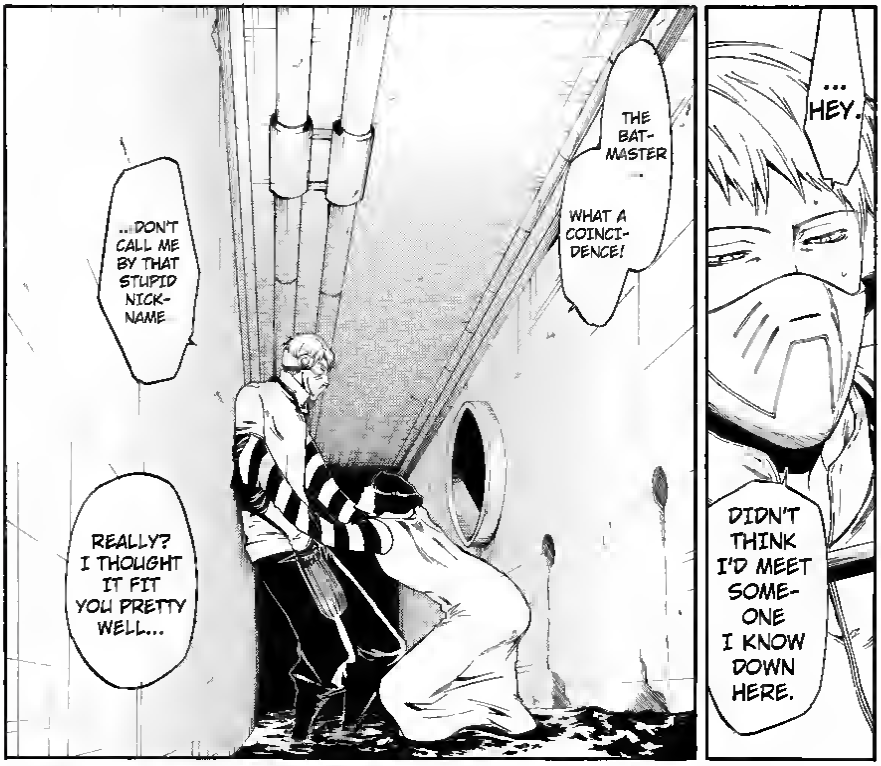
SO I CAN FIGHT WHILE PROTE-CTING YOU, MOTO-HIKO!
MO-TSU
...SO ...
JEE
.. YOU'RE RIGHT
I'M STRONG ..

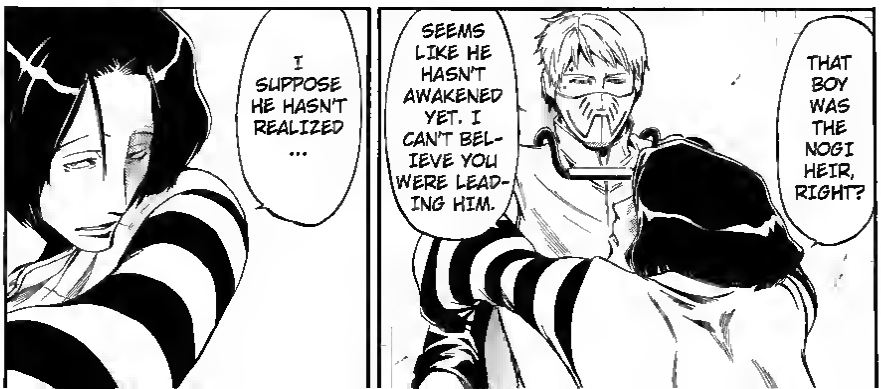
CLANG!!
HOP
KUH ...
SCHINK!
MOTO-HIKO

NOW GO !!
MOT-SU YOU'RE … A GOOD GIRL.
…
…!
GYAHHH
HOP

BLUB...
...
SPLASH
SPLASH
PSHAAAAH
!!
...
UGH
...
STAR

...
YOU
...

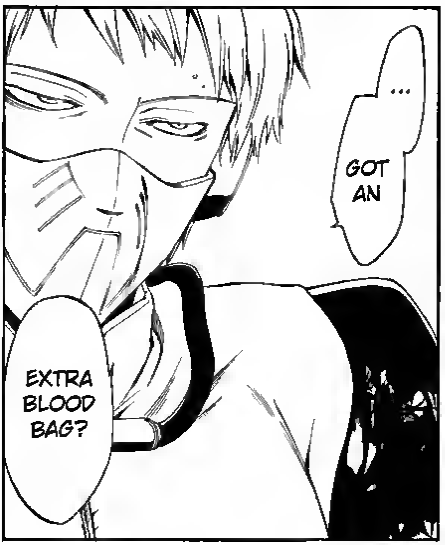

...HEY.
DIDN'T THINK I'D MEET SOMEONE I KNOW DOWN HERE.
THE BAT-MASTER
WHAT A COINCIDENCE!
...DON'T CALL ME BY THAT STUPID NICKNAME
REALLY? I THOUGHT IT FIT YOU PRETTY WELL...

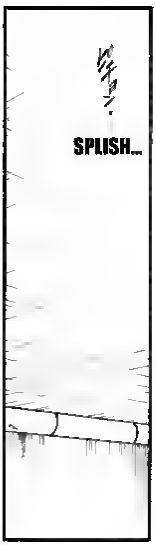

I SUPPOSE HE HASN'T REALIZED ...
SEEMS LIKE HE HASN'T AWAKENED YET. I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU WERE LEADING HIM.
THAT BOY WAS THE NOGI HEIR, RIGHT?

THAT YOU'RE ...
A GEN-ZOJI.

I SHOULD BE A LITTLE MORE DAMAGED WHEN I MEET UP WITH THEM AGAIN.

...HOW ABOUT MAKING THIS WOUND A LITTLE MORE REAL?

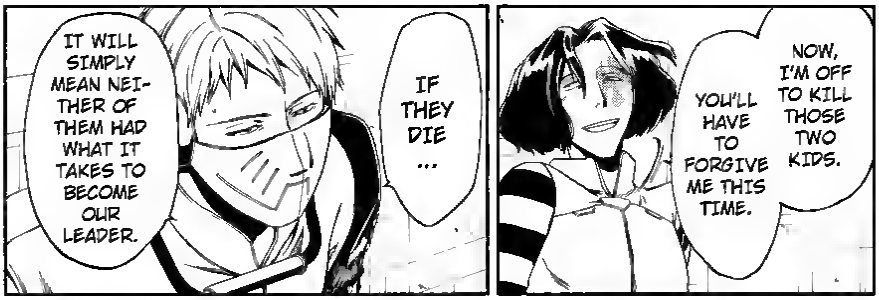

... GOT AN EXTRA BLOOD BAG?

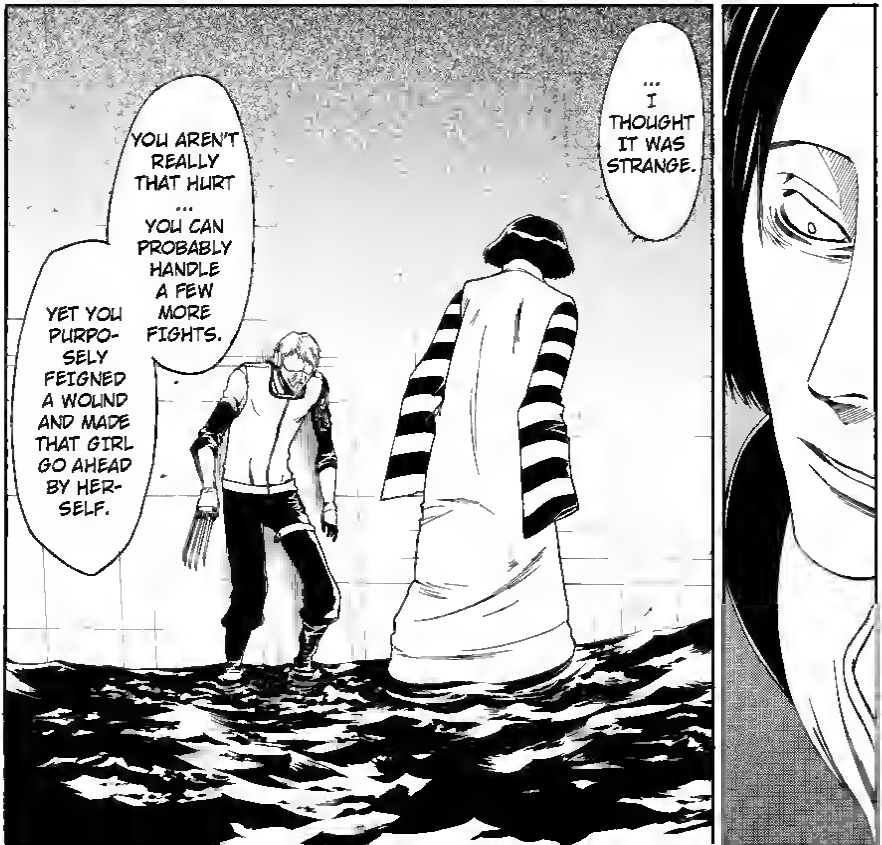

SPLISH...

ONE OF MY OLD COM-RADES IN HIS TREACH-ERY.
RIP
SLICE
I'D JUST LOVE TO ASSIST
CHAK
SPLASH
GAH

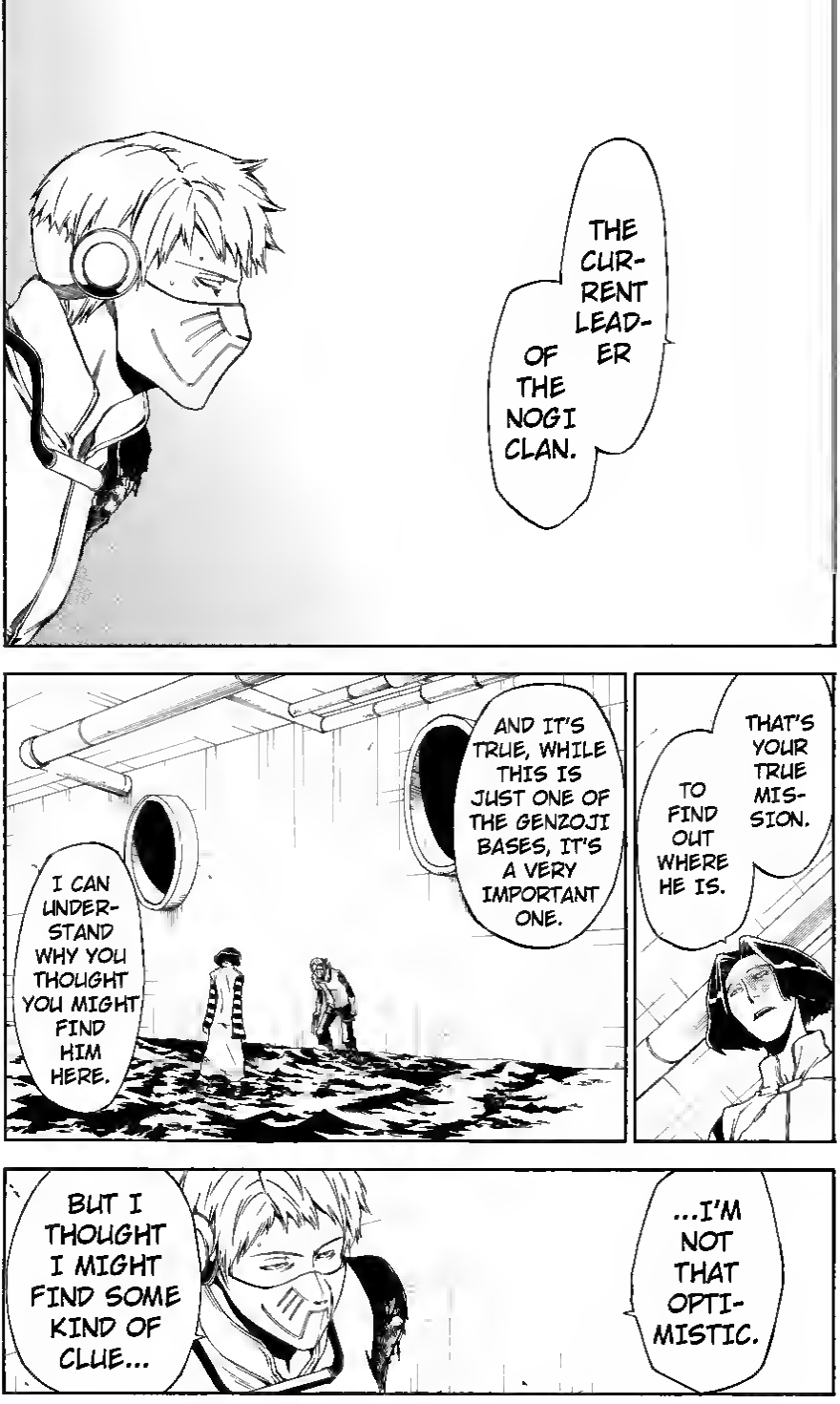
TOSS
SNAP
...
...HAHA.
SHRUG
WHAT-EVER.
LET'S STOP THIS, OLD PAL!
HIGH-RANKING OFFICIALS LIKE ME DON'T USUALLY TAKE PART IN ACTIVE MISSIONS LIKE THIS,
BUT I THOUGHT I'D COME OUT TO KILL SOME TIME.
AND LOOK, I EVEN GOT TO SEE YOU.

IT'S STILL HARD FOR ME TO BELIEVE YOU'D ACTUALLY BECOME A GUIDE TO THE HEIR ...
BUT HEY, WE'RE OLD FRIENDS, AREN'T WE? I'LL LET YOU GO THIS TIME.
*BESIDES YOUR LEG'S STUCK TO THE WALL NOW

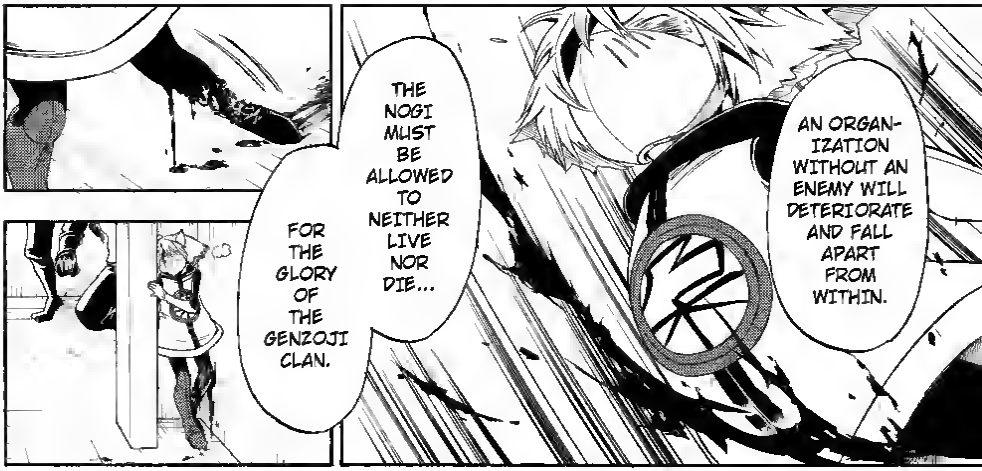

NOW, I'M OFF TO KILL THOSE TWO KIDS.
YOU'LL HAVE TO FORGIVE ME THIS TIME.
IF THEY DIE ...
IT WILL SIMPLY MEAN NEITHER OF THEM HAD WHAT IT TAKES TO BECOME OUR LEADER.


... I THOUGHT IT WAS STRANGE.
YOU AREN'T REALLY THAT HURT ... YOU CAN PROBABLY HANDLE A FEW MORE FIGHTS.
YET YOU PURPOSELY FEIGNED A WOUND AND MADE THAT GIRL GO AHEAD BY HERSELF.

THEY'RE BAIT ...
I GET IT.
EVEN IF IT COSTS THE HEIRS' LIVES.
TO COMPLETE YOUR MISSION,
SPLISH
WHAT'S YOUR TRUE GOAL?
... I SEE.
...


THE CURRENT LEADER OF THE NOGI CLAN.
AND IT'S TRUE, WHILE THIS IS JUST ONE OF THE GENZOJI BASES, IT'S A VERY IMPORTANT ONE.
I CAN UNDERSTAND WHY YOU THOUGHT YOU MIGHT FIND HIM HERE.
THAT'S YOUR TRUE MISSION.
TO FIND OUT WHERE HE IS.
BUT I THOUGHT I MIGHT FIND SOME KIND OF CLUE...
...I'M NOT THAT OPTIMISTIC.

LET ME GUESS: YOU THOUGHT YOU COULD USE THE NOGI HEIR AS A DECOY AND THEN SEARCH IN THE MEAN-TIME, RIGHT ?
MEANWHILE, WE'VE INCR-EASED OUR NUMBERS SINCE WE KNEW YOU WOULD COME TO SAVE THE HOSTAGE.
IF THAT HAPPENS, THEN I PRAY THAT SACRI-FICE WOULD CAUSE THE CURRENT LEADER TO RETURN.
IT'S NOT LIKE THE NOGI CLAN WILL PERISH JUST BECAUSE AN UNAWAKENED HEIR DIES.
... IT'S SIMPLY A MATTER OF PRIOR-ITIES, I SUP-POSE.
I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN A LOYAL SERVANT OF THE GENZOJI CLAN.
.. YOU REALLY SURPRISE ME. YOU'RE LIKE THE MODEL NOGI SOLDIER NOW.
I GUESS PEOPLE REALLY DO CHANGE
I HAVEN'T CHANGED ONE BIT.


AN ORGAN-IZATION WITHOUT AN ENEMY WILL DETERIORATE AND FALL APART FROM WITHIN.
THE NOGI MUST BE ALLOWED TO NEITHER LIVE NOR DIE...
FOR THE GLORY OF THE GENZOJI CLAN.

...
...I DON'T EXPECT YOU TO UNDER-STAND.
OPINION NOTED.
BUT WHENEVER YOU DECIDE TO COME BACK TO OUR CLAN,
I IMAGINE YOU'LL BE EXECUTED AS A TRAITOR.
AS A SIGN OF MY RESPECT TOWARD YOUR LOYALTY,
ALLOW ME TO TEACH YOU SOMETHING ONLY SELECT CLAN MEMBERS KNOW.

IKKOKU GENZOJI, THE LEADER OF OUR CLAN,
ONLY GIVES US COMMANDS, NEVER SHOWING HIMSELF IN PUBLIC.
...EVER SINCE THREE YEARS AGO. JUST LIKE THE NOGI LEADER.

I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHERE HE IS MYSELF.
BUT THERE'S A PLACE IN THIS BUILDING THAT MONITORS HIS LOCATION.
WANT TO KNOW WHERE IT IS?
...I'M LOOKING FOR THE LEADER OF THE NOGI, NOT THE GENZOJI CLAN.

... THEY'RE IN THE SAME PLACE.
THE LEADERS OF BOTH CLANS ARE TOGE-THER ...

!!
DASH
JEE
DRAG...
DRAG...
HAAH
JEE...
NOV
OO...
BAM

USE THIS PIPE AND CLIMB UP!
HEY!
HEY! THIS WAY!
BUT ...
IT'S YOUR JOB TO FIGHT!
WHY SHOULD I?
YOU'RE A NOGI
YET YOU HID, AND DIDN'T EVEN TRY TO FIGHT.
...
WHAT THE?!
YOUR LEG LOOKS HORRIBLE!
... SO YOU'RE FINE?
.... YEAH, I'VE BEEN HIDING IN HERE EVER SINCE I GOT LOST FROM YOU TWO.

HE COULDN'T EVEN FIGHT VERY WELL, BUT HE LET ME ESCAPE ... I LEFT HIM SURROUN-DED...
...
... HE HURT HIS ARM ...
ALMOST FORGOT...
WAIT, WHERE'S MOTO-HIKO?
WHAAA?!
BAM
... WHY ...
NOW WHAT ARE WE GONNA DO?!
...ARE YOU SERIOUS?! THIS IS REALLY BAD!
WHY ARE YOU THE HEIR ...?
WHY ...

IF I HAD BEEN IN YOUR POSIT-ION,
I WOULD HAVE STOOD UP TO BECOME A BETTER LEADER!
I WOULD HAVE FOUGHT WITH ALL MY LIFE TO SAVE THE CLAN!
DROP
...WHY...
WHY WAS IT YOU...!!

... YOU ... YOU'RE RIGHT ...
I'M WEAK. I'M A BAD LEADER ...
... SO, HOW ABOUT YOU BECOME LEADER INST-EAD?
YOU HAVE PURE BLOOD, SO I'M SURE EVERY-ONE WILL AGREE WITH YOU. I'LL EVEN HELP YOU OUT.
... IF I COULD, THEN I AL-READY WOULD HAVE!
BUT THE NOGI GENETIC POWERS ARE ONLY PASSED ON TO MALES!
OTHER-WISE, WHY WOULD ANYONE CARE ABOUT YOU?!
... BUT ... IT'S NOT LIKE I ASKED FOR ANY OF THIS!
I ...
I DON'T ... ... WANT ...

FLINCH
IF YOU'RE THAT AGAI-NST IT,
THEN HOW ABOUT DYING?
...
KEN
...
MOTO-HIKO EVEN SAID IT.
IF YOU DIE, IT MEANS YOU JUST AREN'T CUT OUT FOR THIS.
IF YOU DIE, YOU WON'T HAVE ANY MORE RESPON-SIBILITY.
YOU'LL BE IN A FREE, SAFE WORLD, JUST LIKE YOU'VE ALWAYS WANTED.
... I ...

I STILL REMEMBER WHAT HAPPENED THREE YEARS AGO...
THE LAST TIME I SAW ZUIEKI ...
OUR FATHER ...
...I...
I'M NOT RUNNING BECAUSE I WANT TO!
?!
!
I FOLLOWED HIM, WONDERING IF HE WAS GOING TO TRAIN.
OH... SOME NOGI CLANSMEN!
RUSTLE
D...
DAD!
THEY MOVED AWAY SO FAST THAT I LOST SIGHT OF THEM, SO I GOT WORRIED AND CALLED OUT TO DAD.
THE LAST TIME YOU SAW HIM?
DAD LEFT THE HOUSE ALONE THAT DAY ...

HE LEFT... AND AS I WANDERED THROUGH THE FOREST, SOMETHING APPEARED IN FRONT OF ME.

CORP-
SES
OF THE MEN DAD HAD JUST BEEN TALKING TO.
"AND NO MATTER WHAT, DON'T FOLLOW ME."
"GO HOME."
"YOU MUST SURVIVE..."
"GOT IT, KEN? DON'T FORGET."
"RUN AWAY AS FAR AS YOU NEED TO, EVADE EVERYTHING, AND HIDE YOURSELF."

DAD'S BODY WASN'T THERE,
BUT THAT WAS THE LAST TIME I SAW HIM...
...SO I DECIDED TO JUST KEEP RUNNING FOR AS LONG AS I COULD.
TO RUN, HIDE, AND FIGHT AS LITTLE AS POSSIBLE.
I THOUGHT IF I DID THAT, THEN I WOULDN'T END UP LIKE DAD...
I THOUGHT THAT WAS THE RIGHT THING TO DO ...
RUMBLE
RUMBLE

SLIDE...
THE WALL'S COMING DOWN...!
WHAT THE...?!
RUMBLE
RUMBLE
TREMBLE
!
ALL OF THEM...

YOU CAME WITH GOOD TIMING.
KLAK
THIS CORRIDOR IS CAPABLE OF STRETCHING OUT AND CONNECTING TO AN ADJACENT BUILDING
RUMBLE
THE WALLS ARE
STRETCHING OUT?!
TREMBLE
RUMBLE

REALLY SCREWS WITH PEOPLE'S PERSPECTIVE AND DISTANCE SENSES.
THE STRIPE PATTERN OF THE ORIGINAL WALL AND THE STRETCHED OUT PORTIONS
COMBINED WITH THE BENDS IN THE WALL AND CEILING
CHK!
...!
H... HE LOOKS HUGE!
RUSTLE
ADD IN MY OWN CLOTHING, AND, WELL.. YOU GET THE IDEA
IT'S REALLY TOO BAD THAT YOU HAVE TO DIE IN A PLACE LIKE THIS.
NOT CLOSE ENOUGH
ONE MORE STRIPE!

SORRY.
SPLURT
I MAY LOOK BIG,
OR LIKE I'M FAR AWAY,
...!!
BUT THAT'S JUST AN OPTICAL ILLUSION.
I CAN DODGE THIS!
JERK
GAH ...

HOP
FLIP
SLASH!!
TCH!
?!
H
...
HOW
...
SKRRTCH
YOU THOUGHT YOU COULD DODGE IT EASILY, BUT ENDED UP BARELY GETTING AWAY... RIGHT?
EVEN DESPITE THIS ILLUSION, YOUR PHYSICAL ABILITIES ARE TRULY SOMETHING.
HUFF
HAH
HUH
AGH
...
WHEEZE
SWIPE
WHAP
I GUESS IN A WAY, HE'S BEEN TRAINING HIMSELF AT RUNNING.
HIS MOVEMENTS REALLY ARE AMAZING.
?!

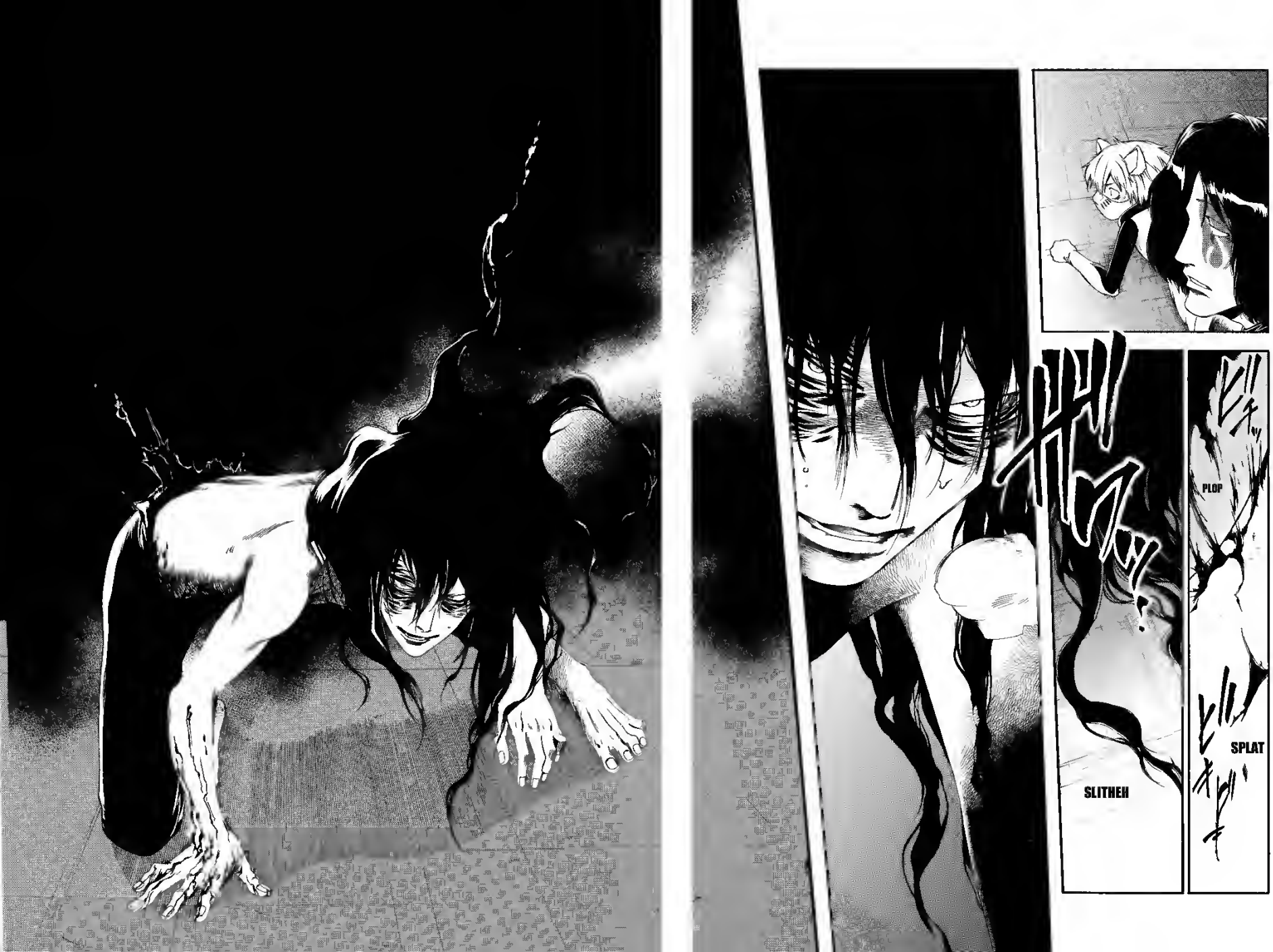
WHEEZE
GUH..
WHEEZE
COUGH
KUH
THROB
THROB
A SPASM !!
N...
NOT NOW !!
THROB
UGH ..!
IF HE DIED HERE ...
WOULDN'T HE BE BETTER OFF?
HE WOULDN'T HAVE TO BECOME OUR LEADER, AND MOTO-HIKO COULD MOVE ON ...

WHOOSH!!
...
AGH
THUD
GWAH
"I THOUGHT THAT WAS THE RIGHT THING TO DO."

BUMP
GRAR
ATTACK-ING ME JUST TO SAVE YOUR BROTH-ER?
HOW BRAVE.
SO JUST STOP FIGHT-ING!
COUGH
WHEEZE
... LOOKS LIKE THIS IS THE END EITHER WAY.
CLATTER...

I DON'T CARE ABOUT ANYTH-ING ELSE.
PANT
I JUST WANT
YOU TO SUR-VIVE!
TH-THUMP
NURNUU..
?!
WHAT ...
THE ...
AH ...
MY BODY ...
TH-THUMP
TH-THUMP

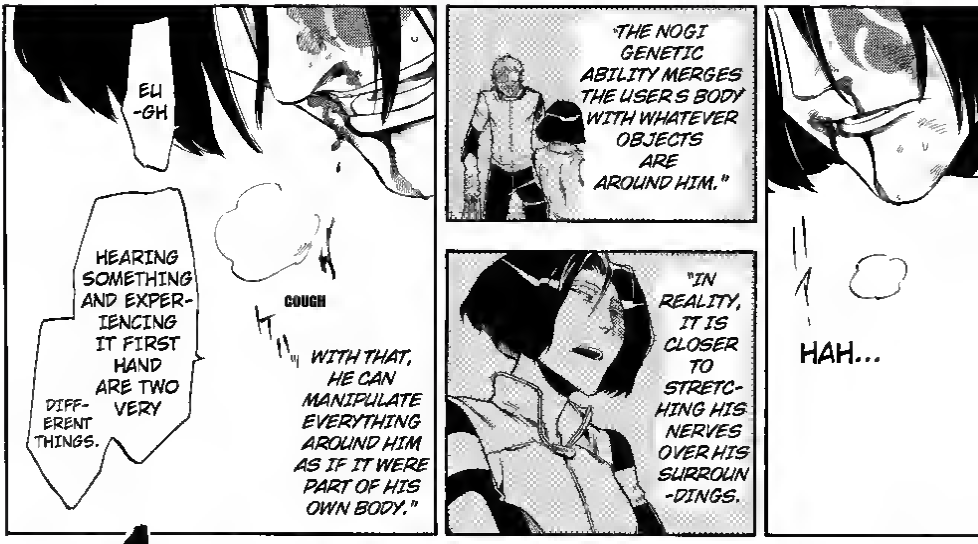
HH
THE HEAT ...
FLOWING BACK INSIDE ME !!
FLEX..
WHAM
HH
CRUMPLE


PLOP
SPLAT
SLITHER

!
FLASH

SMACK

AN EARTH ...
QUAKE ?
RUMRLE
!
CHAK
AHHHH ...
STAGGER
M...
MR. GUA-RD?!


EU
-GH
COUGH
HEARING SOMETHING AND EXPERIENCING IT FIRST HAND ARE TWO VERY DIFFERENT THINGS.
"WITH THAT, HE CAN MANIPULATE EVERYTHING AROUND HIM AS IF IT WERE PART OF HIS OWN BODY."
"THE NOGI GENETIC ABILITY MERGES THE USER'S BODY WITH WHATEVER OBJECTS ARE AROUND HIM."
"IN REALITY, IT IS CLOSER TO STRETCHING HIS NERVES OVER HIS SURROUNDINGS.
HAH...

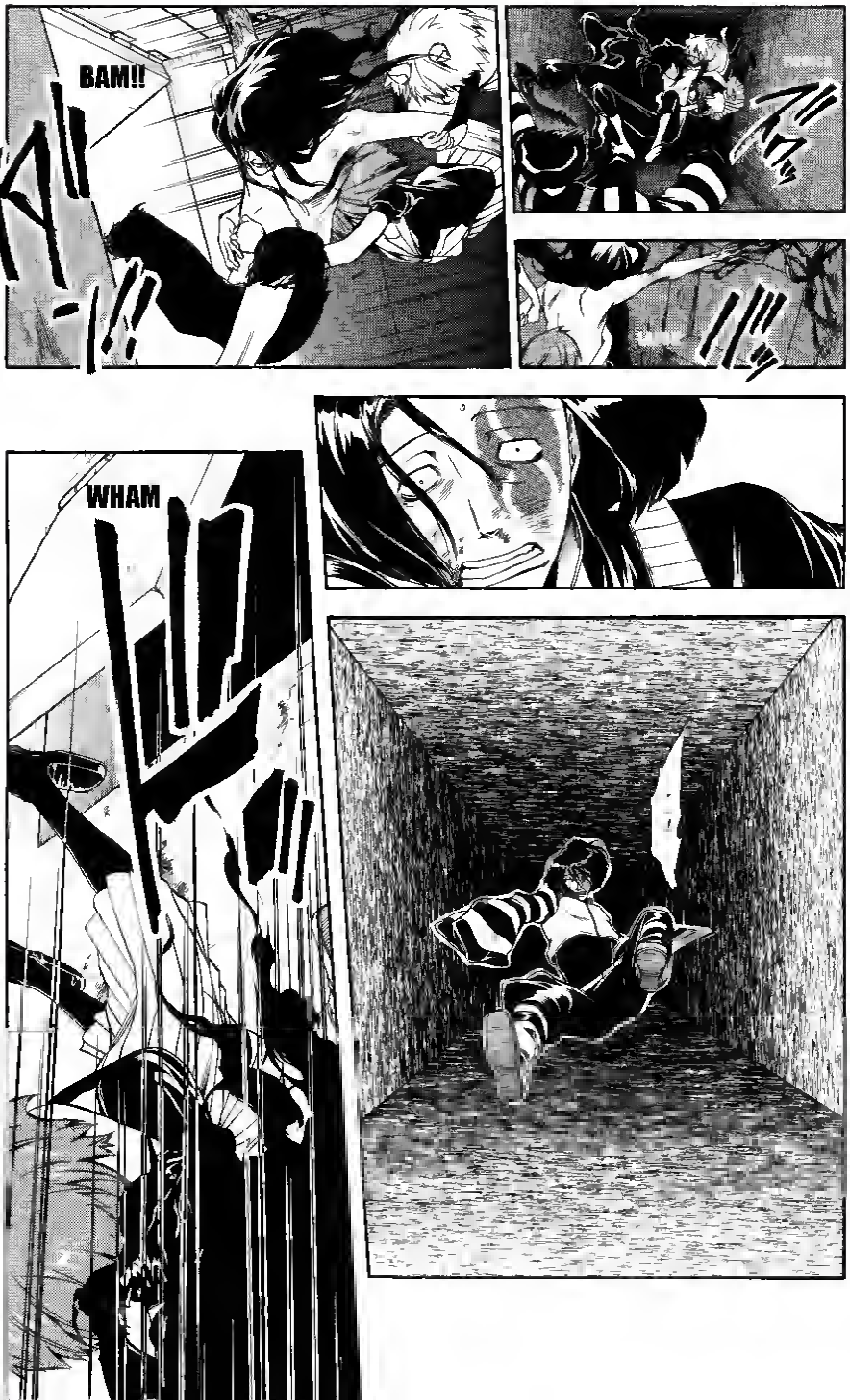
BUMP
AS LONG AS YOU'RE WITH ME, HE WOULDN'T DARE TOUCH ME...
...
CHAK
AHHH!
GRAB
SORRY, BUT PLEASE COME WITH ME.

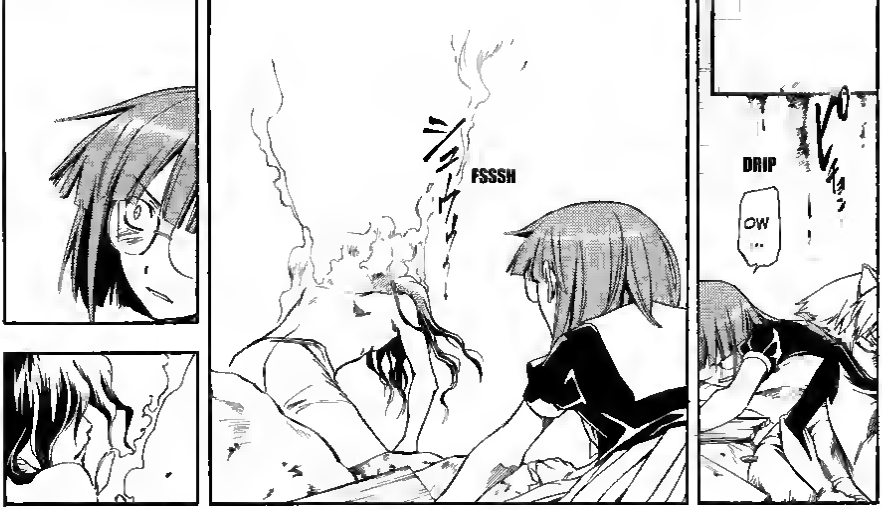
CRACKLE
AHH !!
RUMBLE
AHH
...AHH
SNAP
...GUH...
CRACK

SLIDE...
UUU...
GAA...
AHH...
...
KEN
...?
...
CLICK
WHAM!!
GRAB
...GUH!
GRIP
CLACK

!
YOU KNOW ...
ONE-SIDED FIGHTS AREN'T MUCH FUN,
NEVER THOUGHT I'D GET *THIS* WOUND-ED...

GRAB ME ...
LET GO !
WHOOOOSH
KYAA AAAH!!
AH ...
SNATCH


BAM!!
WHAM


FSSSH
DRIP
OW
...

KAZU
...
...

BLOMP
WAIT ... I'M NAKED ?!
W ... WOAH !!
K ... KEN !!
...!!
THUMP

.. WHERE ARE WE ...?
I KIN' OF REMEMBER BEING BROUGHT HERE
I CAN'T REMEMBER DID I FALL ASLEEP?
HUH...? I GRABBED ON TO THAT GUY... THEN ..
AH ...
RIPPLE..
SPLISH

!
MOTO-HIKO!

NOW, HOW DID YOU ALL GET HERE?
HUH? WHERE ARE WE?

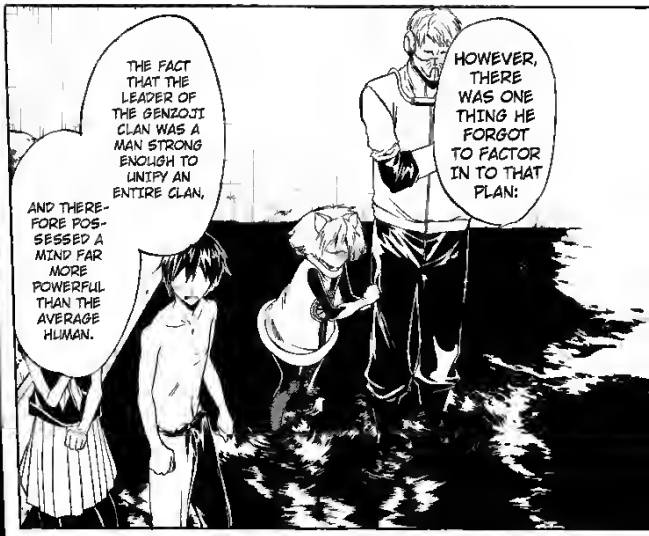
WOAH! YOU'RE ALIVE!
SHOULD I BE DEAD?
OWW.. WATCH OUT, THAT'S A DEEP WOUND.
OVER HALF OF IT'S CLOTTED BLOOD, THOUGH.

THIS IS ...
FIZZZ
FIZZZNN
WHAT IS THAT ...?
I CAN SEE SOME-THING ...
... TEN ...

!!
LIS... TEN... HERE IS YOUR NEXT OR-DER...
HUH...
...THE NOGI GENETIC ABILITY MERGES ITS USER WITH WHAT-EVER HE TOUCH-ES.
...
"3 YEARS AGO, THE NOGI LEADER CAME HERE ALL BY HIMSELF."
"HE HAD THOUGHT UP A PLAN INVOLVING THAT VERY ABILITY."
THAT PLAN
WAS TO MERGE WITH THE GEN-ZOJI LEADER AND TAKE OVER HIS BODY.

SO MUCH, IN FACT, THAT IT TRAPPED HIS OWN CONSCI-OUSNESS INSIDE.

PARALYZING THE GENZOJI LEADER, YOUR FATHER INFILTRATED HIS MIND ...


THE FACT THAT THE LEADER OF THE GENZOJI CLAN WAS A MAN STRONG ENOUGH TO UNIFY AN ENTIRE CLAN,
AND THERE-FORE POS-SESSED A MIND FAR MORE POWERFUL THAN THE AVERAGE HUMAN.
HOWEVER, THERE WAS ONE THING HE FORGOT TO FACTOR IN TO THAT PLAN:

...
DAD ...!

...THIS IS OUR MOST IMPORTANT MISSION.
GLARE
THE NOGI BLOODLINE MUST BE CUT OFF.
ZUIEKI NOGI'S TWO CHILDREN ... MOST IMPORTANTLY, HIS SON, THE DIRECT HEIR.
KILL THE NOGI.
EXTERMINATE THEM.
...OUR LEADER IS NOT DEAD.
HIS MIND IS MERELY BEING OVERPOWERED.
IF WE CAN LOCATE THEM AND DESTROY IKKOKU GENZOJI'S MIND -
IN OTHER WORDS, HIS BRAIN ...

THEN ZUIEKI NOGI
MAY RETURN.
SHE'S GOT A FEVER FROM BLOOD LOSS AND INFEC-TION.
...
CRUMPLE
MOTSU !!
HER LEFT LEG IS IN BAD SHAPE ...
WHAT ...
SHE MAY LOSE IT.
ANYWAY, WE'RE DONE HERE.
LET'S GET OUT.
... HEIR.
SPLISH SPLASH

UNLESS YOU WANT TO SIT DOWN AND WAIT FOR DEATH TO COME...
YOU
MUST FIGHT.

...
YOU TOO.
YOU'LL FIGHT WITH ME, RIGHT?
OF COU-RSE.
UNTIL THE VERY END.

...I DON'T THINK I CAN RUN ANY-MORE.

THEN ALL I CAN DO IS MOVE FOR-WARD.
IF I'M NOT ALLO-WED TO HESI-TATE,

TO A WORLD BEYOND MY WILDEST DREAMS ...